



7. Charles Williams

# “JESUS, THE SON OF GOD,”

AND OTHER SERMONS.

BY

THE REV. THOMAS CHARLES WILLIAMS,

M.A., D.D.,

MENAI BRIDGE.

EDITED BY

The Rev. JOHN OWEN, M.A.,

CAERNARVON.

SECOND EDITION.

CAERNARVON:

THE CALVINISTIC METHODIST BOOK AGENCY.

1928.



## FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION.

THE sacred work of preparing and editing a volume of the English Sermons of the late Rev. Dr. Thomas Charles Williams had been entrusted to an eminent scholar, and one who had been for some years a neighbour of Dr. Charles Williams, the late Principal John Owen Thomas, M.A., D.D. (Glasgow), of Bala. All the available material for the volume had been sent to Dr. Thomas, but just as he was preparing to take the work in hand it pleased the Lord to remove him "into His rest."

I believe it can be truly said that the great Head of the Church has, in His mercy, given to our little country of Wales some of the greatest preachers that ever proclaimed the Christian Message. Few of them are known outside the borders of our own land. The reason for that is that their preaching has been almost altogether in the Welsh language. To us Dr. Thomas Charles Williams was for many years a prince among preachers. He did not confine himself to preaching in his native tongue. He travelled over the borders, and was well-known in the Metropolis and other English centres. He frequently occupied the pulpit of some of the largest churches throughout the length and breadth of England and Scotland, and he was among those called to preach, time after time, at the most important Conferences and undenominational gatherings. At



the same time, to be heard at his best he had to be heard in his own tongue, and among his own people.

It may be well to preface this volume of Sermons with a short account of the life and history of the preacher. Thomas Charles Williams, like several others who have adorned the pulpit of the Presbyterian Church of Wales, was a native of Anglesey. He was born in a small farmhouse at Gwalchmai, a little village near the Holyhead Road, and about ten miles from the town of Holyhead. He was, in a sense, a "son of the manse," his father being a minister but without the pastoral oversight of a church. On his mother's side he could count among his ancestors four eminent ministers of the Word, known as the "Charleses of Anglesey." Young Thomas Charles Williams probably never thought of himself as anything but a preacher, and certainly no one else ever thought of him as likely to be anything but a minister of Jesus Christ. For this he was pre-eminently gifted from his cradle.

After the usual course of preparatory training he entered the Presbyterian College at Bala, where he remained for one year only. He then proceeded to the University College, Aberystwyth, where he spent three years. Even at this early period he came to be recognised as one of the most powerful preachers in Wales, and his services were in constant demand. This must have sadly interfered with his College course, though he worked hard as a student. From Aberystwyth he entered Jesus College, Oxford, in the year 1893. He graduated with

honours in Theology. During his residence in Oxford, and especially during the vacations, he preached Sunday after Sunday throughout the whole length and breadth of North and South Wales, as well as in Liverpool, London and other places. The churches gave him no rest. He was ordained to the full work of the ministry at Bangor, in August 1898. In the earlier part of the same year he had accepted an invitation from the important Welsh Church at Menai Bridge to become its pastor. Here he remained to the end of his days, although pressing invitations were sent to him from other and larger churches. He never left his native county, the fair isle of Anglesey, so ardently loved by all her sons. The University of Edinburgh acknowledged his pre-eminent position as a preacher by conferring upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity, an honour which he greatly appreciated.

He passed into "the joy of his Lord" very suddenly on the afternoon of Sunday, October 2nd, 1927. Some of us had known for some time that he was not as strong as he looked, and that his preaching frequently put a strain upon him of which the thousands who flocked to hear him knew nothing. In his earlier days he had suffered much from rheumatism, and he was, on more than one occasion, laid aside for months. In public and in the company of friends, he was, however, so full of life and cheerfulness to the end that we scarcely perceived the creeping shadow. His end was peace. His last words, which he uttered with his arms out-stretched,

were: "Here is my father, and here's my mother." He then quietly passed into the fuller Presence.

As I have already intimated, Thomas Charles Williams was, above everything else, a preacher of the Gospel, and a preacher of the Gospel to his own people of Wales. He preached far more in Welsh than he did in English, and, though he was a very powerful preacher in English, he was, first and foremost, a Welsh preacher.

One of the most remarkable things about him was the extraordinary ripeness which characterised him when he was a very young man. This has been pointed out by his most intimate friend, the late Rev. Dr. John Williams, himself a prince of the Welsh pulpit. Dr. Williams, referring to a sermon delivered by Thomas Charles Williams when he was only 24 years of age, wrote thus in 1918: "I was particularly struck by his ripeness. His sermon was as full and finished, his material as well-arranged, his thoughts as brilliant and his delivery as masterly as if he had been preaching for twenty years. . . . One naturally asked: In what can such a preacher as this improve and advance? I have never seen anyone who has attained to such perfection at such an early age." I have before me a sermon which he delivered when he was only nineteen years of age, and that sermon fully justifies every word written by Dr. John Williams.

The young preacher<sup>f</sup> did grow, nevertheless. From the start his hearers were dazzled by his bril-

liancy and deeply impressed by his oratory. Everyone acknowledged the power of his intellect, and his masterly presentation of the truth. But, in later years, all his gifts were softened and mellowed and sweetened in a marvellous way. We still, even to the end, knew that the powerful intellect, the sublime oratory and the magnificent art of preaching were all there; but the preacher himself gradually came to teach us to think less about them. They were all hallowed by something even greater and nobler and more divine. There came more and more of "the unction from the Holy One." In Wales his popularity never waned. The people came in their thousands to hear him, and were never disappointed. He gave his best; he gave his all. He spared neither his soul nor his body. He preached to the very end, and at a greater cost than any of us knew.

Unfortunately Dr. Charles Williams very rarely wrote his sermons. For this there were two reasons. First, he was not fond of writing. He was far more ready than most of his brethren to write a post card or a letter, but he disliked writing at any length. His contributions to the press were far too few. He was, besides, a very busy man. His parish extended from John O'Groats to Land's End. He very rarely spent his week from Sunday to Sunday at home. Consequently he had no time to write out the sermons he preached. His usual method was to write a short sketch on two or three small loose sheets, which he carried with him into the pulpit. Of these sketches there are hundreds.

This made the task of getting together a volume of his sermons doubly hard. A few had been written at some length; others had been delivered in London or at different Conferences, and published. For permission to reproduce these, so readily granted, we are extremely grateful. Several of the sermons as published are much shorter than they were as preached.

A few words about Dr. Charles Williams as a minister and as a man may perhaps be added. All who knew him at once recognised in him one of the most genial of men. He always had a winning smile and a cheerful word. He was a man whom everybody who had met him liked to meet again. To his own people at Menai Bridge he was very dear. He was a great friend of the children. As a pastor and minister what may be called the priestly element, in its best sense, was strong in him. One of the Lady Missionaries of our Church, Miss Helen Rowlands, M.A., of Maulvi Bazaar, India, who was brought up under his pastoral care, has written thus: "To me the greatest joy on earth was the first Sunday of the month, our Minister preaching, the big chapel full to overflowing, the preacher in his glory—and a Communion to follow. Oh, the solemnity of the Communion! I shall never forget how he used to kneel at the Communion Table. Our Minister was a Priest. He always led us into the Holy of Holies. To him the Death of the Cross was a terribly living thing, and we felt the power of it. We had the feeling that the Lord Jesus Himself was

present with us." It is much for a Pastor to be respected by his flock; it is a great deal more for him to be loved.

His sympathies were very broad. In Wales we are possibly too much concerned about the things of our own Church or "Denomination." We are, at least, sometimes too little concerned about the welfare of other branches of the great Church of our one Lord and Master. Dr. Charles Williams was a Presbyterian of real and deep convictions, but he had a kind and brotherly feeling for all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. He was a strong "Nonconformist"—a word which the disestablishment of the National Church has made meaningless in Wales—but he was on very friendly terms with several of the dignitaries of the Church in Wales. He occupied the pulpits of all the Churches, Nonconformist and Anglican, and was equally at home in every one of them.

In his preaching he laid special emphasis upon the Person, the Work and the Atoning Death of our Lord. He was modern in everything that is good in Modernism, but his hold upon the fundamentals was strong and firm. He was a great student of the New Testament. To him Christ was the Gospel, and there was nothing else to him worth preaching. When Miss Rowlands, some of whose words I have already quoted, brought to him her difficulties during her University course, he spoke to her words which may be taken as an expression of his entire attitude as a minister and preacher: "Whatever

makes you think more of the Lord Jesus is sure to be right; but anything that lowers Him in your estimation cannot be right." This is a good canon by which to "try the spirits."

I sincerely wish this volume were far more worthy of the great preacher than it is. As things are, in the absence of any but a small number of sermons fully written, it is the best that could be done. It is hoped that many of his friends and admirers, in Wales and elsewhere, will welcome it with all its shortcomings for his sake whose voice speaks to them in and through its pages. May the rich blessing of the Spirit of Truth follow its perusal.

JOHN OWEN.

CAERNARVON; APRIL, 1928.

## CONTENTS.

	PAGE.
FOREWORD ... ..	5
Jesus, the Son of God ... ..	15
The Characteristics of True Religion...	34
The Christian Theory of Conduct ... ..	47
The Secret of Confidence ... ..	57
The Law of Liberty ... ..	65
The Gospel in a Mystery ... ..	76
The Supremacy of Love ... ..	87
Mercy Revealed in Judgment ... ..	97
Judas ... ..	110
The Ultimate Purpose of God ... ..	119
The Apostolic Benediction ... ..	138
The Perils and Blessings of Quiet Times ... ..	148
The Promise of the Morning Star ... ..	164
Jesus Christ ever the same ... ..	173
Form and Power ... ..	183
The Life Eternal ... ..	192
The Wisdom of God ... ..	204
The Lamp of the Word ... ..	211
The Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven ... ..	219
The Higher Life ... ..	231





I.

JESUS, THE SON OF GOD.\*

*"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."*  
MATT. xvi. 16.

My text is from a well-known paragraph out of the sixteenth chapter in the holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, more particularly the words which you will find in the sixteenth verse, "He said unto them, But who say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Our Lord, as you remember, at this time was on the coasts of Caesarea Philippi; and there are several things of interest and importance in connection with His visit to that place. For one thing, and that is not without interest, we are told that this is probably the most northern point He touched. When we read of the constant travels of apostolic men, and of the rapid spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire, and turn back to the Gospels, we are struck, I think; at once by the limitations of our Lord's work. These were not only limitations of time, but limitations of place. How circumscribed the area was in which Christ laboured! And there is some interest, some passing interest, in our Lord's visit to this beautiful

\* Reproduced, by kind permission, from the Report of the Westminster Bible Conference, Mundesley, 1912.

spot, because it was probably the furthest point He reached in that direction. And, also, when He was in this place we are told He was for the first time face to face with what are described to us as the pagan influences that were then abroad in the world. There is a sense, of course, in which our Lord's life is the broadest and most catholic life that was ever lived in the world. The Son of Man touched life at all points. He may be said to have exhausted human life; for there is nothing human that Christ did not touch. Yet, there is another way of looking at it, in which our Lord's life will appear to us to be a narrow life. It will be a narrow life in that sense, when compared with the lives of the apostles. For example, we find upon the thought and upon the language of apostolic men the influence of that wider culture that flourished in Greece and Rome; but you find not direct traces of that in the Gospels. Jesus led the life of a Jew from beginning to end, humanly speaking, without coming into contact at all with those wider movements of thought that were abroad in the world at that time.

And there is considerable interest in His pilgrimage to this place, for now, at any rate, He was on the frontier between Paganism and Judaism, and He was, as it were, in direct touch with those forces against which the Church—His Church—would be labouring for the coming centuries.

Still our Lord's visit was not due to the one or the other of these considerations, but rather to a crisis that had now come into His life, a crisis, I suppose, that comes sooner or later into the life of

every man who is engaged in great public work. The new teacher, up to this point, had been the greatest power in the life of the people. It would have been difficult at that time to find any one who had not come into touch in some way with Him. He had thoroughly aroused the nation, and His congregations were numbered by thousands. But though He had a congregation, He had as yet no Church. Though He had adherents, He had really no disciples. There was at that time, I suppose, no one who understood exactly Who He was, or where He came from, or what He came for. All great movements in the world prosper, not by creating superficial effects upon the minds of the many, but rather by taking full possession of certain minds. After all, the world must be governed by a few men. You make your economic conditions what you like, the world will still be governed by these few, select souls, who will be the incarnations, at is were, of great principles, and great movements. Every great idea gathers strength in the world by its power to take complete possession of certain sympathetic minds, who, in turn, become its apostles. And accordingly we find our Lord retiring for a moment from the crowd that usually surrounded Him, and going to the loneliness and quietness of this retreat in order to prepare at least a few men for the great mission which He was about to leave to their care when He returned to the Father!

He comes at once to the subject of the conference, and that is why my mind has turned to these words. This, too, was a conference,—our Lord's

conference, with the same subject, the same object as we have here to-night. He came to the subject under discussion at once: "Who do men say that I the Son of Man am?" I think it is idle to try to argue, my dear friends, whether He asked that question as God or as man. I do not think we are justified in splitting up our Lord's personality in that fashion. Here we have rather the great mystery of the Incarnation. We already found in our lesson this evening that God, the Son, had "emptied" Himself, and become in fashion as a man. We have God here under human limitations.

You find the first proof of His greatness in the fact that people were so divided in their opinions about Him. There is nothing marvellous in that. "And they said, Some say Thou art John the Baptist; some Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." A great personality always divides the community. We are always united about small men. There is only one thing to be said about them. There are so many men you can sum up in a sentence; there is no more to be said. But when a great man appears, we split up into different schools at once, and it is some kind of a tribute to the greatness of our faith that we have so many sects; for certainly it shows that we are dealing with something about which the human mind cannot agree. It was not very strange that these people failed to satisfy themselves; and they were all, in a manner, right; for there was a sense in which our Lord was every one of these men. He was that which had made John the Baptist and the rest great. Those

qualities were to be found in their ideal completion in our Lord. He was the perfection of all that was greatest and best in everybody else; and here was a hero in whom all men found their own hero, for He was the sum total of humanity, as well as the Son of God.

But will you mark that they not only compared Jesus to great men, or mistook Him for great men, but they took Him for great men that had very little in common, and that is very remarkable. It would not have been very remarkable, for example, if they had compared Him to Elijah or Jeremiah, but it is very suggestive that they compared Him to both; for Elijah and Jeremiah had very little in common. Elijah was the stern and terrible man, almost, perhaps, a cruel man. One of the apostles finds it is necessary to say about him that he was a man of like passions with ourselves. He seemed so devoid of ordinary human tenderness. It was a dangerous undertaking to get Elijah to preach to a place, because if the people did not listen as he thought they ought, they never had the opportunity of listening again! If he was not satisfied with the attention he was having, his custom was, it seems, to call down fire from heaven to celebrate his visit. He had no other solution for the case of Baal's prophets than to kill them in cold blood. He was a man of terror, and he was sent to serve the Lord in a terrible day. But what is remarkable is this, that any one should have thought that Jesus Christ in any sense resembled him. There must be some reason for this. I am afraid we have lost sight of one significant as-

pect of our Lord's personality in these days. There is a little hymn; we use it, we teach it to the children, and I do not think there is a more beautiful or a more effective hymn for that purpose in any language:

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,  
Look upon a little child."

There cannot be anything prettier than that. But it is not very safe theology for grown-up people. I am afraid the Christ of to-day is too effeminate. I hope I am using the word with the reverence due to the theme. We have too much of the "gentle Jesus;" our terms of endearment hardly amount to worship. Remember: Christ was terrible as well as tender; and some of the most awful things that have ever been said about sin and sinners have been said by the Gentlest of all. Let me recall to your minds, my dear friends, this neglected aspect of our Lord's Person and teaching.

But the indignations of our Lord were consistent with the greatest tenderness, for some saw in Him not Elijah but Jeremiah, the prophet of tears and tenderness. Ah, my dear friends, apart from the Divinity about which I am more directly to speak, our Lord's humanity was God's greatest gift to this world, for all that is good and great, the very limits of human possibility have been touched, have been realised, in this personality, Who sums up in Himself all that is greatest, and all that is noblest in humanity from the very beginning.

Well, you say, our Lord was very pleased. The young Galilean prophet was very glad to hear that

He was mistaken for such eminent men. There is no preacher here who would not be cheered if he was told that he reminded men of those great heroes of the past in the pulpits of England and Wales. The young preacher was greatly cheered by this. Not at all! He turns in disappointment, it may be in a kind of disgust, to His disciples, and asks: Are you any further on than that? Have you not discovered something beyond that? I think He asked this with a certain dignity, corresponding, it may be, to the dignity with which He asked them once, when all the crowd was leaving Him: Would you also like to go away? There was a marked majesty and a Divine reserve. Peter was looking at the moment into the very eye of his Lord, and he saw something there he had never observed before, and he exclaimed, suddenly and passionately: 'I see it now, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."' He had never thought of that before. He saw it clearly then, for direct enlightenment had come to him from the Father in heaven. He did not know what he was saying. Of course he did not! No man says anything great if he knows exactly what he is saying. No man is truly great but when he is greater than himself, lifted up by the inspiration of his art, or specially so by the direct inspiration of the Spirit of God. This man saw into the truth at a glance. It took him the rest of his life to enter into the richness of it, but he enshrined in one sentence the great doctrine of the Person of Christ. This is the doctrine that our Lord was satisfied with, for He felt, after He heard it confessed, that He could there and

3298

260  
W675.45



then build His Church; and this is the doctrine. I take it, that this great Conference has been standing for throughout the years.

Now these are the two things I want you to remember. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." What is that? It is *the great confession of the Church to her Lord*; that is one thing. It is, also, *the great testimony of the Church to the world*. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." That is, I repeat, the great confession of the Church to her Lord, and the great testimony of the Church, throughout the ages, to the world.

I. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," *that is the great confession of the Church to her Lord*, a confession which is always beyond her personal understanding, but is nevertheless an essential confession. I only speak as I understand the New Testament, and I have no right to fix limits for any one else, but I regard this as an essential truth. There are truths, which, though they are truths, are not in this sense essential. That is, it is not absolutely imperative that you and I should agree about them; but I take it, that there is nothing plainer in the New Testament than this: that the Church of Christ is built upon this great confession, namely, that the Founder and Leader and Hope of that Church is the Son of God in the strictest sense of that term. I may use the word Divinity; I mean, by that, Deity. I mean that Jesus Christ was, in the highest sense, the only begotten Son of the living God. I do not say, my dear friends, that we can agree about what that means metaphysically. I do

not say that you must not have your theory of this, and your theory of that; but this must be the attitude of the soul towards Christ. He must be our God at any rate. That I consider to be the very essence of the Christian position; and that I find to be the great teaching of this great New Testament Conference.

How am I—I can imagine that some of my younger friends may ask to-night in listening to me—how am I to attain to that conception of Jesus Christ? Well, I think that we shall all attain to that conception if we simply read the description given in the simple and yet profound evangelical account. My brethren, if we could only get back to our Bibles with open minds and simple hearts, how much we should learn! To-day we have men who, first of all, decide what the Bible ought to teach, before they look at what it does actually teach. They evolve a complete theory in their minds. I do not know exactly where it comes from. I think they say it comes from the subconsciousness, and if it does not come from there, you can have it, I am informed, already prepared from Germany. You get a complete system of all things in heaven and earth, that has nothing to do with any actuality outside it; and when you have got that theory into your heads, you then open the Bible, and you say: Here is a verse that agrees exactly with what I have already been saying, therefore that verse is inspired at any rate; because it fully confirms my theory. The next verse may not suit so well!—I am, as you see, letting you into all the secrets of these modern methods,—there-

fore the thing to do with that verse is to try and translate it in some other way. But verses are very stubborn things, like facts; there is nothing to do with a verse like that but to suggest that it was not in the original; and thus you may easily get rid of all the inconvenient texts! I do not find, myself, that there is anything very honest, or anything very scholarly in much of that method, though adopted, I admit, by very honest and very honourable men. I think we should change most of our opinions if we simply read the simple account we get in the four Gospels of the Man, Christ Jesus. What would you find? Well, I think, if you had no other book at all about Him, you would find that here is described a Person Who did not regard Himself as standing in the same relation to God as other men. Of course, you can say He was mistaken. I do not now enter into the question of what was the difference between His relation to God and that of others; but I do not think anybody can read the New Testament without feeling that our Lord, though so near to other men, was still a Being apart. He did not teach that His relation to the Father was the same exactly as the relation of other men. I think that is clear.

You read the Gospels, and what will you find? A sinless Being, in a sinful world. Nobody doubts that. You need no commentary at all to find that these four books give you an account of a Being Who never sinned in thought, act, or deed. Well, where did He come from?

You read these Gospels, and you will find also that this Christ preached *Himself* as the one hope of

all men. That is remarkable, for there have been other great men in the world. Yet they never did this. St. Paul was a great man, I think one of the greatest intellects the world ever saw, even apart from his great message. He preached to very ordinary people, say at Corinth, people whose knowledge was limited, and whose spiritual experience was very small; and you might have thought that St. Paul could have supplied those ignorant and ordinary people with all they required out of the store of his own knowledge and spiritual life. But no, he tells them: Do not look at me, for I am nothing. What I have I got from Him; and if you want the same, you have got to go to the same source of supply, for I have nothing of myself to offer anyone. That is what St. Paul the Great used to say.

But look at this Person described in the Gospels. He does not tell you to go anywhere else, but says "Come unto Me." If you have lost the way, behold, "I am the way." If you are looking for truth, well, "I am the Truth, and the Life," and everything else; and the eternal destiny of every individual soul depends entirely upon whether he accepts Me or not. Can you understand a preacher putting himself in that light before his congregation without there being some peculiar explanation?

And then He concludes His sermons in such a sublime fashion. This simple Preacher says: We part, now this sermon is over, but you will meet Me again, and when I come again, I shall not be exactly as I am now; when I come again I will come on the clouds of heaven, and all the angels of God

with Me, in My own glory, and in the glory of My Father; and all men, from the creation of the world to the last day, will be gathered before Me for final judgment, and from My verdict there will be no appeal. This Preacher claimed to be the ultimate Judge of the human conscience.

Now preaching, in this way, the doctrine that He stood in a different relation to God from other men, and preaching that He was sinless in word and deed; preaching that He possessed in Himself all that humanity required, and preaching that He would be ultimately the final Judge of all men, what happened to Him? Just imagine what would happen to any man who preached like that in our own day. By preaching like that He founded a Church of the best and sanest men the world has seen since His day. That Church has been in troubled waters many a time, but is still here; and throughout the darkness of the ages, surrounded by things we cannot explain, we feebly and yet firmly confess together to-night, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." I do not know what is going to happen to the Christian life in this country in the next fifty years. Our methods of work may change. I pray God, and you pray, that the Church should be kept faithful to this great and sacred truth, the denial of which implies the denial of the faith, that our Lord is the very Son of the living God. That is the great confession of the Church to her Lord; and, assembled from many parts of the world here, now, that is our solemn and joyful confession.

II. But then again, and that is my second point, *this is the great message of the Church to the world.* This is not a kind of academic opinion, for there is nothing of that to be in the Church at all. The Church is a living organism, and every confession becomes a testimony, and that is what cheers me as I see this congregation before me here, even more than any congregation I have had the honour of preaching to for some time; for I know you come from so many parts, and I know you represent such different phases, too, of Christian thought and work. And what if the message of this Conference should be carried through you to all the corners, not only of this kingdom, but of the world? Every confession must develop into a testimony.

Now, why do we preach this great, inexplicable, supernatural Christ? For one thing, we preach Him because this has answered best the purpose of Christian preaching. Mark this. What is the purpose of Christian preaching? It is not to amuse the people, it is not really to instruct the people; it is rather to convince men; it is to win a verdict for Jesus Christ from the heart and conscience of those who listen. That is the supreme object of preaching. And I think that, looking across the centuries, you will find that no truth has answered this great purpose like the supernatural testimony, the testimony of the Church to the supernatural Christ. You know there is a philosophy flourishing in America, with distinguished representatives in this country, one of the main positions of which is that you are to test the truth by its utility; you find whether or

not it is true by seeing how far it will realise its proper and professed purpose. It is easy to criticise that view, but still there is a great element of truth in it. It brings philosophy, in a sense, down from the clouds. We can apply it here. What is truth? That thing is true which you can *preach*, and you cannot preach everything. You talk and write about many things, but you cannot preach everything. You cannot speak to lost men in the sense which preaching implies unless you have those particular types of doctrine that are suitable. And this great truth of the supernatural Christ has answered best, throughout the ages, the purposes of Christian preaching. I daresay one may be able for a time to get men to interest themselves in many other aspects of the truth. I remember I was talking once with a minister from the Midlands. He was telling me about a Church in his town, not his own Church, but a Church not far from where he ministered, and in that Church an excellent man used to labour. He was not orthodox perhaps in our sense of the term, but he was a spiritually-minded man; and by his sermons, and especially by his prayers, and by the charm of his personality, he was of great help to the people who used to assemble there to listen to him. He was taken from his labours to his reward, and a man followed him there, preaching exactly the same thing, but apparently without the charm; and the people at once began to feel the poverty of the land. That thing is a Gospel, brethren, which will be the power of God unto salvation, whoever preaches it. The Gospel that needs the props of

eloquence is not the Gospel Paul was satisfied with. However, another man came to this Church, and he, it seems, was not convinced that the Gospel alone was enough for human needs. He preached as much Gospel as he knew at the morning service, and in the evening he devoted himself to much more important matters, to the questions of the day, and the leading writers of the hour; but it seems that when the Gospel became too small for him, his chapel was very soon too large! We must learn wisdom by this. I put it plainly, my friends, the world is not a fool, and when men come to our preaching services they do not want to hear our eloquence, and see our intellectual gymnastics. They do not want to feed on anything of that kind. If they come there at all, they seek something greater than themselves, something that will help them up, something that can lay hold of them; and the battle of the future will not be between the different creeds, but between evangelical Christianity in its completeness, and no religion at all.

I think it is high time for the Church to give up trying to trim her sails to every wind that blows, but to stick to the eternal verities, even if our churches were emptied. The Church is a great testimony in herself to a truth which she cannot explain, but which still she has trusted her life to. And believe me, my brethren, in these days, when everything is changing, the people ought to find in the Church a solid doctrine that does not change from hour to hour, the very doctrine that Christ first preached, and the apostles preached afterwards. That truth,

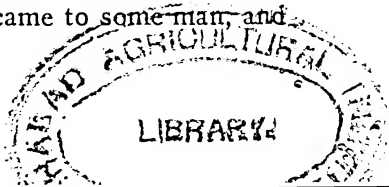


as the Church knows, has answered best the purpose of Christian preaching.

Again, this preaching has produced the highest and best types of character. I know there are great and generous men who do not share all our views. Those men are orthodox in their hearts and in their lives; and I daresay that gradually they will become orthodox in their opinions, for a man's heart and life are of more importance than his opinions any day. Yet opinion based on the attitude of the heart is important, and I wish to speak tenderly of any man who serves God with a true heart. But we are dealing now with exceptions. When you take a broad view, you will find the men who have done the greatest things in the world are the men who had a great creed. A meagre creed, eventually, will breed a meagre soul. They tell us the time has come for us to throw overboard the ancient creeds; I am not here to defend them, but before you throw your dogmas overboard, I think it may be well to discover some other means of producing like results. You may judge everything ultimately by the type of character it produces; and the men who believe the greatest truths have also in the main done the greatest things.

I can imagine that some young man may be listening to me to-night, who wants to ask me a question. He tells me: I live here; I am no theologian, and I don't want to be. I have no time. I shall be to-morrow engaged in my usual work; but what I want to know is, what does it matter to me for my daily task whether Christ is the Son of God or not;

or whether I believe, or deny, your doctrine? That is a fair question. We ought never to preach anything from our pulpits that is not of some immediate help to the people who listen to live; for to live is a growingly hard thing. Perhaps we ministers of the Gospel are more anxious about the sorrows of the people than we often get credit for. We have reasons for knowing how heavy is the load of many a man, and how difficult to bear. Now this is what St. John says about that question: "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" That is how John looked at it. Now, my friends, overcoming the world does not mean getting on. The man who gets on is not of necessity the man who overcomes the world. Many a man has made his fortune and lost his soul in doing so. Many a man commands his millions, but his millions command him too. To "overcome" the world is a different thing, and a very difficult thing. You will never do it without that aid which comes from a great trust in a living Lord, Who is greater than an example, Who is a Divine Saviour. We want Him continually. My dear friends, the devil is not afraid of a mere man, even at his best. But the man linked to God becomes to him a peril. The man who believes that Jesus is the Son of God is the man of whom he is afraid. There is a certain amount of humour, evidently, in the evil spirits. There is a very charming account of this in the book of Acts. There were men, you remember, who used to cast out devils, not in a very orthodox fashion, and they came to some man, and



they said the formula over him: In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, and Paul, come out of that man; and the evil spirit seems to have just put out his head to see who was speaking, and he said, "I believe you mentioned Jesus of Nazareth. I know Him. I have reason to know Him. And I think you mentioned Paul. Well, he is a later acquaintance, but he is getting very well known now; but I do not think," he adds, "I have ever heard of you before. Jesus I know, and Paul, who believes in Jesus, I know; but who are you?" I should not like to suffer under the sarcasm of the evil one in that way. I wonder if the evil spirit is asking sometimes who is preaching now in England. Spurgeon is dead, Parker is dead, Dale is dead, and Maclaren is dead; without going over any more, or going further back. Who is there now? Scholarly men, undoubtedly, but have they made themselves known? My dear friends, the devil is not afraid of an Erasmus, with all his culture; but he is in mortal terror of a Martin Luther. We may be very clever, but we do not believe, and that is why we are weak. The Church would be transfigured to-day if it could only lift itself by the Spirit of God to the height of this great faith and testimony.

And now again, and finally, the Christ we preach is to be the hope and glory of the Christian Church for evermore; and the Divine resources that are in Him are absolutely sufficient for that purpose. All men grow out of date. You do not go back now, in any branch of science, to those men who led the world in the very beginning of those sciences. Every

man, if he lives only a few years, becomes out of date. After all, it was a merciful providence that arranged that our years should be only three-score years and ten. It is quite enough. Even of Martin Luther, to whom I referred just now, you will find in some accounts that as he grew old he was losing gradually the enthusiasm and interest which he once felt in the great Reformation he was led by God to start. We become weary, and we are out of sympathy and touch very soon. When a man has done his work, the greatest kindness God can show him is to take him immediately to his reward. But here is the great exception: the Christ Who led the Church in its early beginnings is the Lord and Head of the Church to-day, and will be the abiding Lord in the history of the Church through the coming ages and for evermore. And I say that is unthinkable, apart from the Divine resources that are in Him.

Let me therefore, my dear friends, plead with you to cultivate a greater and loftier faith. If I can say it without being misunderstood, we need a greater Christ, and that would mean a greater message. We live in an age when everything is changing, and our faith falters, and our knowledge is limited; but that doctrine—let me tell you as I close—that doctrine is most likely to be the right one which gives the greater glory to Christ; which opens the widest hope before humanity, and which will give us the highest and greatest incentive to constant service for God and man.

## II.

### THE CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUE RELIGION.\*

*"How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!"* etc.—PSALM lxxxiv. 1—7 (R.V.).

It is impossible to read this psalm and similar psalms without a kind of wonder, almost a feeling of envy, when we discern the heights of religious experience which these holy men had attained to at that time. Very probably those heights were not reached by all men even then: yet all were able to understand and appreciate these expressions of devotion, for this book was the book of their common prayer and praise. A whole nation able to appreciate sentiments of this kind! For remember, they had never heard of Jesus Christ. They had never received the teaching about God which Christ gave. They knew nothing of the wondrous Cross, or of the Resurrection. They had never been to the Communion Table. Yet, without these things which we regard as indispensable, they reached a height of spiritual experience such that the Church to-day cannot produce a book of devotion that can be compared with the Psalms of the Old Testament. We can produce books of doctrine, and certainly books of moral teaching far beyond, very likely, anything that they

\* This Sermon is reproduced from "The Christian Endeavour Times" by the kind permission of the Editor.

could produce, but then religion is not doctrine, though there is doctrine in it: it is not morality, though morality springs from it. Religion is that deep mystical communion with God in the very depths of the soul, and these men attained to that in its fullness.

Of course, there were certain things which made it perhaps easier for them to attain these heights than it is for us. The advantages are not altogether on our side. They had certain advantages, arising mainly perhaps out of the very limitations of their outlook. They lived in a small world then, and it has been the belief of Christian people that, if you narrow the outlook, if you bring the sympathies of life into a narrow groove, it is helpful to deep and high religious experience. That, I take it, lies under all forms of asceticism. At any rate, these men lived in a world which was much smaller than our own. To the Jew this planet was the centre of the universe. On the planet he knew of only one land, a small country. He knew very little about the throbbing life of Greece and Rome. He lived a cloistered life in a small country, and in that country for him there was but one city, with no competition—only Jerusalem, the city of the living God; and in that city there was just one building, the Temple; and in that Temple there was just one small room where the visible emblem of the presence of God was to be seen. All the life of the Jew turned round that definite, fixed point.

Life now is a broader and a bigger thing altogether, so that men have not the time for that medi-

tation, for that quiet growth, that thing that creates saintliness. This planet now is just a little speck of dust. I should not be at all surprised if, before long, we have maps of this solar system in which this little planet is not put down at all. This becomes a difficulty to faith which the Jew never felt. It is very difficult to believe that all the stupendous facts of the Incarnation and the Atonement and the constant work of the Divine Spirit are confined to this little insignificant planet. Yet at the same time life is becoming so full of interest that people now are not in so much need of another world, and God is crowded out by His own creation. Therefore we behold men with superficial enthusiasms and quite a correct little theology and ritual, but no depth, owing to the fullness of our own time.

But we are only in a transition period. Some day, yet to dawn, knowledge will be one: it is not so now. It will be quite soon enough for our friends who speak on behalf of science and civilization to taunt the Church with our endless divisions when they can live at peace among themselves, which they have not yet learned to do. Religion is in a transition period, but some day knowledge will be one. There will be the great synthesis, and all humanity will be one round a bigger thing than the Shekinah—round the Cross and what the Cross stands for. Then saints will be produced the like of which have not been found in all the ages of time; but to-day we are just on the march from the remarkable experience of those early days spoken of in the Book of Psalms to that best which is yet to be.

But there are certain things which are always common to religion, whether in the early days of the Jew or at the very end of time. You find these not in the creeds, for creeds change, or in any organization, for the organizations change, but you find them in psalms, for the psalm is a perpetual thing. A true psalm will touch a chord in the hearts of all good men, whether living under the Old Testament or just before the Judgment Day.

I have read this familiar psalm because I want to point out very briefly one or two things mentioned here which are common to God's good men in all lands and in all assemblies.

I. RELIGION IS ALWAYS THE SAME IN ITS INWARD PRINCIPLE. Jewish or Christian, pagan or Christian, true religion in essence is ever the same to all men, whatever be their form of belief. And what is that? "My heart and my flesh cry out unto the living God." That instinctive cry of the soul for God is religion. It has nothing to do with sect. All saintly men are one in this fundamental hunger for God.

This is instinctive to the soul of man, and its instincts are always sound. Faith is natural, instinctive: doubt is artificial—it is something you learn in college. That is why Jesus said that we have to be turned and made like little children.

You have strong words used by the psalmist throughout these psalms to express this hunger for God. If religion comes into the soul at all it is an intensifying power. Knowledge can come into a man's mind and occupy a room, and keep to that room without dominating the personality at all. True



religion can never be kept in any room within the personality: religion rents all the rooms immediately and puts a fire in every room, and opens the windows. True religion, if it is anything at all, is an intensifying thing, that captures the whole individual; so the psalmist speaks of it as hunger and thirst and longing. Hunger and thirst are the most agonizing pains of the body, longing is the most agonizing pain of the mind; and these are just the words that the psalmist here employs to give some idea of his feeling towards God. It was not a kind of academic interest in the Being of God, not a kind of intellectual curiosity to know a little bit more about God. This man is dying of hunger for God, and religion is that: therefore it is the most powerful thing in the world.

And mark, it is for the living God that he hungers—not for anything that God creates, not for anything that God gives. You need not have any religion at all to desire good health and prosperity, but this man wants the essence of God, the living God, under whatever conditions. That hunger for God is the characteristic note of true religion across the ages.

There is in this longing a sense of love and of separation, for you never long for anything but what you love, and you never long for what you love, unless for a time you are separated from the object of your love. That is the idea here. The man feels that he is away from home: the soul feels that it is shut in, and cries for the wings of a dove. That is why our Lord condemns worldliness so much; for there cannot be a greater negation of

religion than worldliness. If you can make yourself at home in this world at its best, you know nothing of what is spoken of here as religion, which is the hunger of the soul for God. Men used to faint under the pressure of this hunger long ago, according to this psalm. Men never faint now, except from some physical cause. You find a man fainting on the roadside, and a medical man says, "Ah! poor man, he has not had anything to eat for three days, and the heat of the sun was too strong for him." You see a pilgrim long ago, and when he sees the spires of the holy city it proves too much for him and he lies on the ground in a faint. Some old prophet comes along who knows the man perhaps, or who understands the complaint, at any rate, and he says: "Ah! poor man, it is a longing for God that has overwhelmed his soul." Do we understand anything about that, or is religion only a plaything with us? See how real a thing religion is for this man, and how real it is to be for us. This is not a fashion in religion, but an elemental thing that you find anywhere where true religion is to be found. This hunger for God has its inward pain.

II. There is another characteristic of true religion under all conditions, viz., ITS OUTWARD FORM. "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts." There never was a religion in the world—there cannot be a religion in the world at all, without its corresponding cause. There must be an altar. Worship is essentially social. There must be a meeting for prayer: it is characteristic of religion in all ages.

I want to lay special emphasis upon this, because the majority of the people of this country do not seem to attend any place of worship at all, and they will tell you that they are as good as those who do. They say that they have no help at all when they come to any house of God. God forbid that I should try to tell you this afternoon at what altars you ought to worship, when Christ said that "this mountain" or Jerusalem did not count: it was a matter of spirit and of truth; but you must have an altar of your own, a place, wherever it is, where you feel that you are getting nearer and nearest to God. If a man has not that, I do not see how he can have any religion at all. How many men in this country to-day are starving their souls. There are men who declare that they have the fear and love of God in their hearts, but who are never seen anywhere praying; you never meet them at any organization to spread the principles of the Kingdom of God; and still they deceive themselves that they have in their souls what is spoken of here as religion. The apostles had a short and easy way with these brethren. Even St. John, who was perhaps as polite as any of them, when he heard of a man of this type said: "Would you please convey my compliments to him and tell him he is a liar," which is a very apostolic way of dealing with this kind of man. You may condemn the organized Church in many aspects of its work, but there can be no religion without an altar somewhere, and if the people of this country are turning their backs upon the altars of God, religiously they are starving their souls.

There never can be a religion without an outward form. However simple—the simpler, perhaps, the better—there must be some expression of the hunger of the soul; some place where the hunger is satisfied, some place where men who have a common hunger for God meet together. I do not suppose there was much architectural beauty at the time when the psalmist first sang this psalm. I do not know whether architectural beauty is always the help it ought to be; but nevertheless a man may have a keen sense of the beautiful without any strong moral qualities in his soul. Here it is that spiritual beauty spoken of as “the beauty of holiness,” or as the twenty-seventh psalm puts it, going to the temple to see the beauty of God, that vision of the essentially, and eternally beautiful that a man gets when he prays.

Do you remember the name that John Bunyan gave to that simple place of worship which he used to attend? I do not suppose it was a very impressive building, especially in those times, when God’s good men were hunted over the earth; but he had a name for that unpretentious dissenting chapel: he called it the “Palace Beautiful.” John Bunyan saw nothing in a prison—no one ever did—but there he had quietness to write down what he had seen in the “Palace Beautiful,” the vision of the altar; and this must be the experience of all men who know anything about religion.

The psalmist descends, with that sincerity which keeps the thing from being absurd, from these heights of holy ambition to poor little birds. The

mystic, as you know, regards Nature as the garment of the spiritual and invisible, as the symbol of the Unseen. So the psalmist, from the height of his longing for God, thinks of two little birds, the most unpretentious, helpless birds known—the sparrow and the swallow. I do not suppose that they are the objects of envy in any book of the world except here. The sparrow is a very small bird, but, says the psalmist, it is a bird with a wonderful instinct for a site for the building of a house. Some men have a kind of genius for that, a genius for a situation; but the psalmist says the sparrow is before us all in that. She has built a house, a small house, unpretentious in appearance, near the holy altar, the best place, according to this man, for a house in the world. And the swallow has to bring up children. I suppose this man was bringing up children somewhere, and he realized that the swallow had a better chance of bringing them up well than he had, for she might lay her young on God's holy altar. This man, in all earnestness, would rather have been a sparrow or a swallow near God's altar than a man banished. Have you ever felt like that? Has the altar of God meant that for you? To all men who have this instinct for the spiritual, the altar is all.

III. Finally, there is THE EFFECT OF RELIGION UPON CONDUCT. That is always common to the experience of the different religions. Religion can mean nothing at all unless it carries some effect on conduct. A man may be a philosopher and still be a bad man, and I would not be entitled to say that he is not a good philosopher because he is a bad man, for philosophy

as such does not imply any line of moral conduct; but if any man, as St. James puts it, says he is religious, and his life does not correspond, that man's religion is vain. Religion always means something for conduct: it turns itself into character. We find in this psalm what religion meant for character then, and it must mean the same for character now. You find it in three words with which I close our meditation this afternoon—Guidance, Support, Security.

1. Religion means *Guidance*. I am talking to young people who will be alive fifty years hence. You want someone to guide you, and you cannot trust to anything that you have learned off by heart and committed to memory: there must be the infallible instinct that springs from communion with God. Here you find it. "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart are the high ways to Zion." True religion creates an infallible instinct which is the guide of life. There is no religion which is infallible which has not the moral instinct.

Some of you come down to my country in your cars. You are in great difficulties constantly. You have maps and the whole road is shown there; we put up fingerposts to help you, and there is generally a man to consult. Still men get lost. Why? They are tourists passing through. But you have never seen a child with a map to show him the way from school in those parts. I could almost forgive a child for throwing stones at a fingerpost: it is a most ridiculous and unnecessary thing for him. Why? Was he taught the way at school? Not that I am aware

of: he was born there; his home is there, it is his native heath. Religion is an artificial thing for you and me if we do not know something like that, if we do not know what it is to be in such real touch with God that we are born to the realm created by God for us to walk in. There is the guidance of an inner instinct.

The same thing exactly occurs in faith and belief. How is a man to know, especially in these days, what is true and what is not? There is an instinct. You remember those striking words of our Lord—they come so quietly, and are all the more powerful on that account—"The sheep did not hear them." It is a most impressive sentence. Some men came: they were very eloquent, and they appeared to be talking the truth. The sheep did not create any disturbance; there was no heresy hunt; they did not ask any questions: they simply went on paying no heed. They knew it was not from God. These impossible sheep, how did they know? The sheep "know His voice," because the theology of the New Testament is not a thing of intellect, but a thing of experience. How does a man know that Christ is the Son of God, and that His death was an atonement for sin? Because he has been saved by it. There is nothing that will keep your theology fresh and true but a living experience of this wonderful redemption of Christ.

2. Religion means *Support*. "Passing through the valley of Weeping they make it a place of springs." How did God's people get to the valley of Weeping? They must have lost their way! The

valley of Weeping is not on the way to Zion! Ah! we talk like pagans very often. A man says, "I must have done something to offend God, because I have had nothing in my home the past twelve months but illness and disappointment and death." Well, it is very good for you to be tender on that point; but you are talking like a pagan, not a Christian. I can understand a pagan, whose fortune depends on the whim of his god, talking like that; but it does not follow at all that because you are in the valley of Weeping you have lost your way. There is a highway to Zion through the valley of Weeping, a royal road, opened by the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with griefs. The great thing is, have you anything to support you in the valley of Weeping? It produces nothing; you have to carry everything with you, and true religion in all ages has sustained the souls of men in sorrow; it has been a succour in the valley of Weeping from the psalmist's days on to our own.

3. Religion means *Security*. Every man wants some light on the future. True religion has always been a victory over death. "They go from strength to strength, every one of them appeareth before God in Zion." The whole significance of life to you and me is whether we are getting nearer to God or further from Him.

I was sent last year for a short trip to get a little rest. I went to Ascension and was dropped down on a little island waiting for the ship to come back in a month. It was the same ship, with the same officers, but a very different company going and return-



ing. We were a very respectable people going. They talked nicely if you talked to them. We tried to arrange a concert, but nobody was in the mood for singing: there was a sort of respectable silence over the whole community. No wonder, for they were all people leaving home, most of them for a long time. They had just said Good-bye to wives and children. They were not likely to see home again for months and years, perhaps never. There was nothing wrong at all: the weather was all right, but there was a sense of drifting away from home that made joy impossible. Coming home it was the same ship, and worse weather if anything, but there was a remarkable change in the crowd. They were singing all day, morning, afternoon and night. "Three cheers" for everything, it did not matter what. The cheers became more frequent as we neared the point where the most disagreeable noise you ever heard put a thrill through them all. It was the anchor chain. There is no particular music in that, I can assure you, but to them it was the finest music, I suppose, that they had ever heard, for it meant that they were home.

Religion is coming home to God; and it does not matter what the weather is, it does not matter what the sea may be, if you are going with a great company of God's children who go from strength to strength, and every one of them appeareth before God in Zion. This religion is yours if you accept it in Jesus Christ our Lord. . Amen.

### III.

#### THE CHRISTIAN THEORY OF CONDUCT.\*

*"As servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."*—EPHESIANS vi. 6.

IN these simple words, which refer in the first instance to one particular class in the Church, St. Paul gives a general and comprehensive summary of the Christian Theory of Conduct. The whole duty of man consists, we are told, in "doing the will of God." And there are two indispensable conditions to the right doing of that Will. The Will of God, on the one hand, must be done "from the heart"; on the other, it must be done "as servants"—literally, as *slaves* of Christ. This seeming contradiction between freedom and authority lies always at the heart of Christian morality.

The Will of God must be done "from the heart"; that is, it must be the free, spontaneous, full expression of the man's own personality. It is not to be something imposed upon him. It must be willing obedience without fear, hesitation, or compulsion. There is to be no dread of punishment nor a hope of reward in ideal moral well-doing. That was the fault in a famous definition of duty

\* The copy of this Sermon is reproduced from a pamphlet issued by the Westminster Congregational Church, London, by the kind permission of the Bookstall Superintendent.

once given by a celebrated Christian philosopher, who said that it was the doing of God's will "for the sake of eternal happiness." The moral is not to be for the sake of anything. It is in itself ultimate. It is not the means, but the final end. There is no moral merit in doing anything, after all, at the bidding of another—even at the command of God. The soul of morality is the independence of the will.

And yet again, the Will of God should be done "as slaves of Christ," as men who have made the great surrender. The Early Christian Church had a short Creed, which really ought to be sufficient always for belief and life, "Jesus is Lord." There is nothing in the law or prophets which is not contained in that. We must guard ourselves against thinking that morality is a mere matter of personal preference. This tends to be the modern view. Men justify their moral extravagance by saying that they are true to themselves; or, that they are following Nature. We are sent into the world as men, and called out of the world as saints, not to follow Nature, but to obey God and follow Christ. There is a great, stern, objective law in harmony with which we have to shape our lives. "As servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."

What, then, has Christianity contributed to the moral thought of mankind? Is it more than a new arrangement or a new emphasis? Is there anything in the Gospels in the way of moral teaching which cannot be traced to the Old Testament and the expositions of the Jewish Doctors? And what

of Paganism? The pagan world, to which the aids of revelation are supposed never to have come, had, by the light of Nature, an amazing idea of the beautiful, the true, and the good. It refreshes the mind, and saves it from narrowness to bathe the soul now and again in these clear pagan waters.

Yet it has often been observed that in their moral teaching there were at least these manifest limitations: they had no final or exhaustive idea of virtue; they had no historical examples in which their moral ideals, such as they were, could be said to be exemplified, and they had no adequate moral motive to urge men to the doing of what was right, and to sustain their efforts. The words of the text show that in Christianity we have the perfect moral ideal—the “Will of God”; the perfect historical example, “as slaves of Christ,” and the adequate moral motive, “from the heart.”

I. A PERFECT MORAL IDEAL. One would not say that the moral teaching of the ancient heathen world was wrong, but it was at best partial and incomplete. When we compare the Cardinal Virtues with the Beatitudes we find nothing wrong in the former, yet we are conscious of something lacking. And the constant “Ye have heard that it was said . . . . but I say unto you,” in St. Matthew, suggests the same imperfection even in the authoritative teaching of God’s own prophets.

I hope I am not misreading the signs of my own time when I say that something is greatly needed to correct the moral sentimentality of these days.

There is a kind of moral softness abroad, which is really more dangerous than our lax theological views and our ecclesiastical indifference. The bulwark of personal and national morality is Religion. At one time men consoled themselves that even if Religion was threatened, morality would remain. Nietzsche seems to have been quite honest about this, and he taught that there was no safe shelter for morality either, at least not for Christian morality. There is a tendency to-day to preach a kind of non-ethical love of God, a Fatherhood without holiness, emerging in a kind of tidal wave of universal forgiveness obliterating all moral restraints.

No civilization is safe without a profound respect for law, as well as for charity, in the hearts of the people. The Home Secretary has told us that the more terrible the murder and the more clear the guilt, the more numerous the petitions for reprieve seem to be. When a criminal becomes a hero then the end of all things is not far off! The great thing many seem to be concerned about is to get "eternal punishment" out of the Creeds and "capital punishment" out of the Statute Book! All I want to emphasise is that they are two aspects of the same movement, and both can easily be justified on the score of humanity and generous sentiment, yet the danger of both should not be lost to view. There is hardly ever a "decline and fall" for any Empire but from a moral cause.

A wave of Puritanism, then, in this country to purify the moral air would do no harm. And I would invite you again to a reverent study of God's Holy

Word from this standpoint. We owe this to our Lord. For some say that our interpretation of Christianity is responsible for this state of things. Does our Faith, as we show it forth, tend to give men a more easy, indulgent idea of life? Does it minister merely to our natural love of ease and to our suspicion and hatred of change? To guard from this we ought to follow again God's progressive revelation of His Will in Holy Scripture, and we shall find it to be progressively exacting. The strong ethical note in the Hebrew Prophets is followed and surpassed by the still more searching teaching of our Divine Master. Lord Salisbury, whose eminence as a Statesman accounts for our forgetting sometimes how great a Christian he was, says in one of his Letters that he was afraid that the moral teaching of Christ was, after all, of little practical value because it was so infinitely above anything which anyone could hope to realize. And this was no interim-ethic; the Sermon on the Mount is still, and must remain, the moral programme of the Kingdom of God.

Above all, we have the Cross. God had still more to say than He said through any prophet, and He had more truth in store than was revealed in the public ministry of His Own Son. But the Cross exhausts the moral mind of God. There is no more to say in time or eternity. And St. Paul, when he said that all would have to appear before "the judgment seat of *Christ*," implied that the Cross was not only the one ground of our hope, but also the measure of our moral attainment. We are to be

judged by the Cross—God's moral highest. This, then, is the sublime ideal to which the Church will have to attain.

II. A HISTORICAL MORAL EXAMPLE. The ancient world had many moral giants, but they were imaginary, and were not historical. Moral perfection for them was surely not exemplified in the gods! If anyone needed forgiveness, the Greek gods did! The strength of Christianity lies in the life of Christ—lived by a Man under common human conditions. God in his eternal, transcendent holiness can hardly be an "example" for frail humanity to follow. The footprints of the world's moral Redeemer must be on the sands of time. And so the Christian life has been aptly described as the "imitation of Christ." The classic on this is the work of a monk, with the evident limitations of his order. The idea is too mechanical. We are not to reproduce Jesus with unimaginative literalness. The question, What would Jesus do? is, surely, rather futile. The real question is, what are *we* going to do in His Name. The true imitation of Christ means that by constant, prayerful communion with Him, based upon and rooted in a deeper mystical union, we are to catch His spirit, and reproduce it personally according to our own individual characteristics and the conditions of our age. There are these notes in Christian morality which I would beg of you to consider; it should be social and not merely personal; it should be universal and not merely national; it should be positive and not negative.

(a) *It should be social in outlook.* By this I mean that it must imply more than the saving of our own souls. In the eighteenth century I find that religion consisted chiefly in individual spiritual concern. The world, in its opportunities for service as well as in its suspicious allurements, was something to be feared, hated, and shunned. Or, at least, ignored. I read a good deal of Newman lately, and I could not help sharing in the feeling that he seemed often to live in a kind of world of his own, in utter ignorance and indifference as far as any of the social problems of his period went. The Church is constantly in this danger. Religion and Theology lose reality by being divorced from Life. The vitality of the Church has been sapped by endless, and often unprofitable doctrinal, critical, ecclesiastical discussions. The Church—and I say it with all respect—has really no right to waste time on Vestments when the children of the poor are not clothed at all. And think of our slums, and the pressing housing problem! I am well aware of the enterprise of this Church in this great matter. You have put before us a great and interesting example, and I wish well to your work in the area you have chosen. For I do not hesitate to add that until more has been done by the Church in these matters the date of the Book of Daniel can wait!

(b) *It must be universal in scope.* There is nothing nobler and yet nothing more dangerous than genuine patriotism. "My country, right or wrong!" Yet that, unless we watch and pray, is



the way of misunderstanding, and eventually of war. Morality at first is national, and tends to remain so. Such was the morality of the Jew; it had little if anything to do with other nations. "Thou shalt not kill" meant "Thou shalt not kill a Jew." And this idea of the limits of responsibility is not dead to-day. The honest old farmer sells his faulty horse to a perfect stranger at the fair with an easy conscience, because he was not cheating anyone he knew! Nor are we as a great nation any better, if, in our dealings with what we call "inferior races" in different parts of the world, we proudly forget that they also are men. It is a source of serious weakness to Protestantism that we have no Inter-National Protestant Christian Church. Our Christian discipleship implies that we have deliberately made ourselves responsible for the salvation, not of our own land, but of the whole world.

(c) *It is to be positive, and not merely negative.* Christian morality is an active, heroic, constructive thing. It is a "*doing*," and not a kind of well-behaved uselessness. What Christianity has suffered most from is the negative, weak, colourless character of her ethic as presented to the world. It seems to be a counsel of safety and no more, always a running under cover, rarely a venture over the top. We must get nearer to Christ, to share His moral daring. The man with the one talent was cast out into utter darkness, not, it appears, because he did anything wrong, but because he did nothing at all. Christianity is not a great negation, it is a manly crusade.

III. AN ADEQUATE MORAL MOTIVE. On this I must not detain you, though the importance of the point amply warrants it. For what is the purpose of the whole discussion, if we are left with the thought that the thing, however desirable, cannot be done? The ancient world knew of nothing, as a moral driving power for states and individuals, which corresponded to the doctrine of *love* which we find in the New Testament. The Will of God is to be done "from the heart;" and in the heart the love of God is shed abroad. The "will" is done by the "love." Men work out their own salvation "because God worketh in them both to will and to do." Christianity was probably the first religion to locate the home of virtue in the heart. Both Paganism and Judaism placed it in formal obedience to an outward law. Christianity says to every man, "Love Christ to the full extent of all the combined powers of your soul, and then do whatever you feel inclined to." That love will be your inspiration and your infallible restraint. And, mark it well, it is not philanthropy, or what we call humanitarianism that is here described as the adequate moral impetus; it is the "love of Christ." By that love we are to understand, not our love to Him, which is often weak and fluctuating, but His wonderful, eternal love to us verified in our religious experience.

This love unites the otherwise conflicting instincts of the soul, and links them for ever with the inexhaustible resources of God. It adds beauty to morality as well as power. Love is the supreme moral wonder of the world. We find it in

the mother's love for a sick child, which even in these days of universal self-seeking as we call them, will make her ready at any moment, without being at all conscious of doing anything remarkable, to sacrifice her life if by that her child could be spared. People crowd the ancient Abbey of Westminster more than ever. No one comes up to London lately without going there. And they are not going there to see the graves of kings, statesmen, or poets, but the resting place of a soldier, who is known as the "*Unknown*." I shall be pardoned for hoping that he may be a Welshman from some remote village among my own hills! However, the whole world salutes him, not for his gifts, for no one knows of them, but for the love which sacrificed itself unto death. But I plead with you not to stop at any Cenotaph; go forward to the Altar and the Cross, where you will learn that true worth does not consist in material or intellectual distinction, but in a spiritual vision, in a simple, glowing faith and in love and unstinted devotion to the service of God and man. Amen.

#### IV.

#### THE SECRET OF CONFIDENCE.\*

*One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.*—PSALM xxvii. 4.

THIS is essentially a Psalm for a time of war. I have thought more about this than any Psalm during the last few months. Whatever the occasion may have been, a conflict of some kind was impending, if not actually raging, and the value of the Psalm for us to-day lies in that. It describes the proper attitude and mind of a man of God in time of war. The spirit of the Psalm is the spirit of abounding confidence; and this is not the optimism of ignorance or of indifference; it is not the joy of the man who does not know, or of the still more hopeless man, the man who does not care; but rather it is the reasoned triumph of faith at a critical time.

The Psalm opens with three great reasons why the Psalmist is confident, though he is surrounded, as we are surrounded, by the sound of a terrible war; and I want to call your attention to these familiar things, because they are the only reasonable grounds for confidence in war-time.

\* This Sermon is reproduced from "The Christian" of Sept. 23, 1915, by the kind permission of the Editor.

The first ground of the Psalmist's confidence is in his personal relation to God, and the realisation of it in his own mind. No man can be absolutely confident in a crisis unless he has firm hold on God. This man could say: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"—as if he said: "I do not feel particularly inclined to be afraid of anyone, but suppose I did, where could I find a proper object for my fear? For the object of my fear must be greater than the object of my trust. Now the Lord is the object of my trust, whom shall I fear?" I daresay St. Paul knew of the Psalm, and we find the echo of these words in Rom. viii. 31: "If God be for us, who can be against us?" The real strength of a man in a great national crisis is his grip on God.

The second ground of the Psalmist's confidence is his past experience of God's protecting care. It is a very great thing for a man in a crisis to have a great and rich experience. "When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell." As he looks over the past, he says: "Many a time I have seen the enemy approaching, I have just counted the hours that remained for me to live." Foes were always coming, but they never came; not because I conquered them, but because God always intervened. It is something for a nation, and it is a great thing for a Church, to realise that in similar difficulties before, God has been their refuge. Relying upon that ex-

perience, there is a climax of confidence in verse 3, which, I suppose, is hardly surpassed in Scripture: "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident."

Now that is a great word. Our Lord said that it is not a very wise thing for a man with ten thousand men to go out to battle, if he knows there is another man with twenty thousand coming against him. But here you have one man challenging a whole army! And he tells them he does not want to take them at a disadvantage; let them choose the best positions, let everything be in perfect order, let them encamp against him, and still his heart shall not fear. One man against an army? Yes, but it is one man who knows that God is on his side; and, after all, it is not the counting of the army or navy that is so important at a time like this, as the fixed conviction in the heart of the nation that God is on our side. That is how the Psalmist felt, and that is how all men must feel, to be confident in a time of war.

The verse I have taken for a text brings before us the third reason for the Psalmist's confidence—namely, his determination to abide always in direct communion with God. I have spoken of this man's great experience. But a wise man has said about friendship that it must always be kept in repair. I may almost say, in the same way, that our experiences must be kept in repair, and the only way to keep experience in repair is to have it repeated.

Now this man is going to guard his communications. I have desired one thing of the Lord. I know my strength is from the Lord; and if the enemy get between me and God, I am like other men. But they are not going to do that, for I will dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, "to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple."

The strength and hope of a nation in time of war is in the temple. "One thing have I desired of the Lord." There is always one thing in the life of every man. Human life is very complex, and it is difficult to estimate the life of an individual; for in order to estimate, we must see the one thing which gives it weight and colour, because there is one central thing in every life, and a man must be judged by that. Here is a man who had one thing in his life; and that kept him strong, so that he could not be moved.

I. A LIFE SPRINGING FROM ONE DESIRE.—"That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life." Here we are face to face with one great principle in human life, that our real characters are not determined by our accomplishments, but by our desires. The real man is the man you want to be, not the man you are; not what you have done, but what you would like to do. God does not judge as man judges, for the world judges by results. There is one thing the world will never forgive in a man—it will never forgive him for being a failure. But God will. Most of God's people are failures; but they

are attempting something great, and they are judged by Heaven in the light of their attempts, not in the light of their achievements. The great thing, after all, is not what you have made out of life, but what you would like to make out of it. God looks to that, and He sent His Son into the world to make up for all your failures, and He gives you the credit for your attempts. Every man is judged by God in the light of his inward desire. If we take up the teaching of the great sermon our Lord preached on the Mount, we find that a man may be guilty of a thing he never committed, simply because he desired it. You need not commit a murder in order to be a murderer; hate amounts to murder in God's sight.

There is in every man one ruling passion, and that ruling passion is the real character of the man. The real delight of the Psalmist was to be engaged in worship and service all the days of his life. You remember those words: "Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated." I cannot somehow think of God hating an individual; but I can understand Him hating a type, and I suppose we understand something of that when we speak of God hating Esau. But Esau was somehow the better man; he was a fine country gentleman, a man who was popular with everybody; still he never prayed, he was essentially a secular soul; he never built an altar; he never felt the need of one; he was a man of the world to begin and to end, and a type of man God hates, in spite of all his other virtues. Jacob, on the other hand, was a suspicious, bargaining kind



of man, a man who would not obey the Almighty until he found out what he was going to get for it; a despicable man. Still he had his redeeming feature; there was a certain devotion deep down in his soul, and he never went anywhere without building an altar and praying to God. What is the result? Esau grew coarser and coarser, and disappeared from history; Jacob grew finer and better; the good that was in him triumphed until he became a very prince among the people of God, and one of the greatest figures in Israel. It was the redeeming influence of this passion for spiritual things. All great lives must be lives of one desire, and the greatest desire of all—worship and service.

• II. A LIFE BASED UPON ONE PLAN.—After all, it is a very futile thing to have a gracious dream, a noble idea, and to have no practical plan of realising it. Religion is no mere sentiment, it is a very practical thing. I know God shapes our destiny, His plan must be carried out; but still you have a plan of your own, and you are responsible for that. Now this man had a plan to realise, and there were three lines in his plan:—

(1) *To place the spiritual in the foremost position.*  
—I speak strongly for that any time, but more strongly now. There never was such a time as this, and there is no need for me to impress upon young men the need to put religion first. You had better settle it before you get to the Front. It is not enough that you have religion on the plan of your life somewhere; it must be in the chief, central position.

(2) *To submit his programme to the approving will of God.*—"One thing I have desired of the Lord." The atheism of to-day is not speculative. I never meet a man who denies the existence of God. People do not go to the trouble of doing that; they say: "We grant it all," but still they go on, as if there had never been a God. Atheism to-day is practical and not speculative. The fool said in his heart there is no God; in his mind he knew better. We make our programmes, we submit them to the wisest men we know; but we hardly ever bring these things before the approving will of Heaven.

(3) *To apply all the energies of his mind and heart to realise this plan himself.*—"That will I seek after." Our seeking must be in accordance with our praying. What is the use of praying for daily bread if you don't work for it? If you cannot work, God will give it you, but if you can He will not. What right have we to pray for forgiveness if we never forgive? What right have we to pray for the things we never seek? There must be absolute harmony between a man's prayer and his life.

III. A LIFE WITH ONE OBJECT.—"To behold the beauty of the Lord and to enquire in His temple." There is a worse thing than having an unworthy object in life, and that is, to drift through life without having any object at all. I am not asking you why you get up so early and work so hard. You tell me you have got to do that to live. I know you work to live, but my question is: What do you live for? Why should you live?

This man had a two-fold object in life. "To behold the beauty of the Lord"—that was one—a kind of mystic contemplation, and there must be that: Do not make your religion too practical, for religion is this inward aesthetic sense of communion with God.

"And to inquire in His temple." But life is not merely contemplation; it is inquiry. We are not to try to silence the questions of the world; it is rather our duty to try to answer them, and the answer is in the Temple, not in Nature. Nature can only echo the question. People are telling us that, in spite of the terrible situation in which we find ourselves now, the worship of the temple is not in such high regard even as it was before the war began. The first bloom of our religious awakening at the outbreak of war has already disappeared. Let me plead with you, as the Psalmist was pleading with the men of his own day. Be loyal to the temple. Count your men and your ships, but they are of no use without that central protection of God represented in the temple; for through the temple will God be able to hide us in the day of trouble in the secret of His covenant.

## V.

### THE LAW OF LIBERTY.\*

*"Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."*—ST. JAMES i. 25.

FATHERS AND BRETHREN,—

You will allow me, before we proceed to the consideration of our subject, to add another short, simple and sincere word of welcome to this Alliance on behalf of the General Assembly of the Church of Wales, whose guests you are. The Chief Magistrate of this City and the Bishop of this Diocese have given a warm reception to us all this afternoon. As an Ex-Moderator, I am privileged to add a further word. We are well aware of the honour conferred upon us by your coming; and I trust that your visit will be as pleasant to you as I am certain it will be profitable to us. I wish particularly to welcome those delegates among you to whom English is not their customary language, because it is to that band I myself belong! The language I am using now is not the ordinary language of my Ministry or my home. Let

\*Preached before the Pan-Presbyterian Alliance at Windsor Street Church, Cardiff, on Tuesday evening, June 23, 1925.

me with much joy bid you all welcome to our midst in the name of the Lord, and may your coming and your going be under His abundant blessing.

THE criticism usually made on this Epistle of St. James is that it does not contain a definite and adequate presentation of the Gospel. The value and point of its ethical teaching is readily and generally recognised, though perhaps, even in that respect, it would not be unnatural to inquire whether there is any real advance here on what would be expected, or found, in the O. T. Prophets. What more, for example, do we find in St. James than in Amos? There is but scant reference in this Epistle at all to our Lord, and no teaching at all on the significance of His Death in its relation to faith and the forgiveness of sin. We miss in fact what in St. Paul's letters would be described as a Gospel. Is it in a true sense a religion that is taught here, or mere morality? In consequence of such considerations many devout and learned men were driven to agree with Luther's classic condemnation, and gravely doubted whether the Epistle was, in any true sense, a contribution that had a right to be in the Sacred Canon. But surely this true disciple of Christ and this great student of His teaching, this man so saturated with the Master's very phraseology, was not, even at so early a date, without a definite Evangelical vision. He was clearly a man of considerable learning, particularly in the Wisdom Literature of his own nation.

But had he a Gospel? This is a most important issue for the Church of our time. The supreme question for us to-day is: Have we anything to tell the world which it does not know already, or which, at least, it could not have discovered without our aid? Is a sermon merely a leading article, with the Benediction at the end? Is the Gospel just another Chapter, and at best an incomplete one, in human philosophy? Or have we something for which we are not of our own selves responsible—something we have “received of the Lord;” a sacred deposit of truth to be grasped by faith, realised in experience and proclaimed openly as a Gospel? The soul of the Church is this gift of a Gospel. It is the only essential thing, but often the thing lacking. In theological opinion and ecclesiastical order the Churches are seemingly as far apart as ever. We draw nearer to one another only as we draw nearer to the heart of our spiritual life. Unity, of value, can never be reached if it is set before the mind as a definite object to be sought. If we concentrate on the Gospel, union will come naturally and unobserved as a by-product. We as Presbyterians are supposed to possess a certain gift for Church Order, but our virtue may become our peril. We may be lost in our own schemes. As you are aware, the general law in every great movement is for the original idea which gave it being to crystalise in time into an organisation, which, in turn, always tends to attack and destroy the idea which gave it being. For that reason there must come at times a revolution in a State, and a revival in a Church, to set free the living

soul. Here in this verse we find a great Gospel in the *revelation it contains*, the *obedience it demands*, and the *perfection of which it is the only guarantee*.

## I.

First, then, take the Gospel as presented here in the *revelation it contains*. It is the "perfect law of liberty." This great phrase must refer to the Christian doctrine and Gospel. It cannot be applied to anything which can be found in the Old Testament, or in the great thinking of the classical eras. Had St. James done nothing but give, by the grace of the Spirit, this description of the Gospel, his contribution would have been remarkable. It is one of the great phrases of Literature, not found elsewhere at all, but here, as you remember, found twice. It may well be originally one of our Lord's own, treasured in the mind of this devoted hearer. I might add also that it might well serve as a fitting motto for this great Alliance.

The Apostle was a Jew; and, to the Jewish mind, the highest and ruling concept was that of Law; not natural law, of which the Greek, and the modern world have known more, nor common, public law, in which the Romans were experts, but a moral and spiritual law existing in, and revealed by the moral mind of God. This Jewish brain is the most wonderful phenomenon in the intellectual history of humanity. To the Jews of ages long past, we owe practically all our moral ideas. Salvation is of the Jews. Other nations have also a great tradition for intellectual distinction; but their creative power has long since

evaporated. They live only by the works of their ancients: but the Jew to-day, as a living force, dominates the economic life of the world. Was it not said, by someone who knew, that twelve Jews could even have stopped the War? What commerce means for the Jew to-day, moral idealism meant once. No greater thing therefore could at that time be said by a Jew of anything than that it was a "perfect law."

And it would be well even for us to reflect that the Gospel is a Law, and the highest of all laws. The Gospel, it must be admitted, has certain definite characteristics which tend, when superficially regarded, to lead us to think that, so far from being any kind of law at all, it stands for sudden interventions and for the gracious irregularity of God. As illustrations of this, I may mention the place it gives to Miracles in the material sphere, and to the Forgiveness of Sins in moral experience. Both these things are essential to the New Testament conception of a Gospel, and it is beyond our power at present to harmonise either with physical or moral law. St. Paul says that "we know in part": he might have put it that we know "*in parts.*" We know in sections: the modern tendency is to specialisation. It is often necessary to remind scientific men that the material Universe which they study is not the whole of reality. A scientific man may well exclaim that miracles are not provided for, or accounted for, in his department; but then, his department is not all there is. We are as yet but on the march, and the word miracle is one of the passing expressions



of our intellectual pilgrimage. It will one day die out of the language, when we shall have arrived at that great synthesis, which will both include and explain these mysteries, and we shall find, as Brown- ing said, that all is love, and yet all is law.

Of this Law the Apostle says two suggestive things; and the first is that it is a "law of liberty." This is both arresting and daring. It strikes us at once as a challenging contradiction. Is not law the very negative of liberty? Can there be liberty if there is law? It has taken the world a long time to learn that it is a bad law, not law in itself, that threatens human liberty. A "perfect" law in all the realms of experience is the indispensable safeguard of liberty, both of action and thought. In every moral act there must be these two aspects,—a law, fixed, definite, unchanging, defiant, imperative, which will brook no disobedience—and, yet at the same time, every moral act must be the free, full self-expression of personality. There is no real worth morally in doing anything because we are commanded to do it, even when we are commanded by God. The heart of morality is freedom.

It is also, we are told here, a "perfect" law. By that we are to understand that the Gospel is final and ultimate, not an interim arrangement like the Old Testament Dispensation. It is God's last word, because there is no more to be said. The Gospel exhausts the infinite mind of God, because it is centred in the Son of God made man. It is the saving intervention of the Highest in our affairs, and is the

ground of our undying hope. The faithful proclamation of this stupendous message is the one concern of the Christian Church. It was with this the Church started: it is only so it can triumph. To neglect this will involve the inevitable relapse of the Church into Judaism and into paganism.

## II.

Then comes the *obedience which such a Gospel demands*. If God has approached man so majestically, how ought He to be received? What adequate response can man give? Nature in her full glory cannot be compared, for simple, impressive majesty, to the approach of God in His grace in the moral redemption of man. Our response is to "listen." Religion does not begin in the human playing upon the Divine, but in God speaking first to the soul of man, and securing the full attention of his total personality.

The wonderful discoveries of our time would almost paralyse us if we had a little more imagination. You pass a small cottage in the quietness and obscurity of the distant country, and when you enter, you will probably find an old man there alone absorbed in "listening" to a concert in London or Paris. It is all carried to him; he has only to attend. God too is speaking all the time; though such are the preoccupations of our day that we pay but little heed. This true attention of the soul, this listening to God, is, for us who minister in holy things, the true equipment for our work. We must learn to be "quick to listen and slow to talk." The apostle

must, to begin with, be a disciple; and he must continue to be a disciple all the way. We listen too little, and talk too much; we read too much and pray too little. We must learn to retire oftener, through prayer and meditation, into the inner solitudes and silences of God. In that silence, God speaks.

We are told here, further, of two kinds of "listening." There is the listening to forget, and the listening to obey. At times certain superficial, evaporating impressions are made upon the mind, a passing emotion, which leads to nothing. The Gospel is too great to be treated in that shallow way. It is spiritual discourtesy, and harms the soul. You will note the Apostle's striking illustration to emphasise this.

"For whoever listens, and does nothing, is like a man who glances at his natural face in a mirror." It may not, I admit, be the chief point in the words, but there is here a suggestive, secondary implication. No one ever goes to the glass to see anyone but himself. He looks through the window to see a friend who may be passing; he goes to the album to recall a half-forgotten face: but no one goes to the mirror for anything but to see himself. Great would be his fright if he did see anyone else there! That is how a man should come to God's Gospel,—to get an honest portrait of his soul. We are becoming strangers to ourselves. When next you go to Church, do not worry as to how the minister preached; ask your soul how did you attend. Even in God's holy Sanctuary, there are certain moods of mind, in which a man is proof to all appeals. "So clear away all the foul rank growth of malice, and make a soil of modesty for the Word."

In further explanation of what is meant by this "listening to obey," the Apostle employs three impressive words, "look," "continue," and "do." "Whoso looketh,"—not a casual glance, but as of a man face to face with an overwhelming vision which silences and stuns the soul. If we have not seen a spiritual fact in that way, we have in reality seen nothing. In this mystic contemplation we must "continue." It is not to be an occasional inspiration, but a fixed attitude of soul. It has always to be kept up. To rejoice is often easy, it is however hard to rejoice always; to pray is often a relief, but it is difficult to do it without ceasing; for many things man is promptly thankful, but how about being thankful in all things? And it is to end in practice; which is the spirit and purpose of all true faith. "Act on the Word, instead of merely listening to it." There is nothing more devastating to the soul than waves of unreal emotion without any corresponding practical result. We are called to translate the thought of God, as expressed in His Gospel of Grace, into the prose of our own life, and so be made worthy of it.

## III.

Finally, we have *the perfection of which all this is our only guarantee*. "This man shall be blessed in his deed,"—not this man among others, and not this man even chief of all, but this man *alone*,—he and no other. And "to be blessed," in the sense here meant, includes more than a kind of sense of outward well-being due to favourable circumstances; it means that all the deep, elemental powers of the soul have

been discovered and thrilled, and brought into full touch with their native environment in God. Religion is essentially an intensifying power in the soul. It makes the whole man awake and hungry—for God, and not God in Nature or Philosophy, but the personal God of grace in Christ. The sphere of this bliss will be service. "He will be blessed in his activity." We have not done well in putting into so much prominence the soothing idea of a final rest. Have you ever thought—you must have thought—about the use which God is going to make of the perfect Church, created, disciplined, made perfect by the Gospel? This glorified Church will be the absolutely perfect instrument for carrying out the moral will of God. The angels have not our experience; they are the servants who cannot understand all their Lord intends. Is this Church, saved at such a cost, to be dismissed immediately at their one first meeting together, and sent to lounge for ever in the arbours of Paradise, touching a harp occasionally, if not too exhausted, and doing nothing further for God or man for evermore?

Can that be regarded as a worthy destiny for man? Rather we should think of this life as a short introductory chapter in a book to be eternally written. The gracious programme of God remains to be for ever carried out, and we are to lose and find ourselves in His eternal service. Man can be truly blessed only in his deed.

Brethren, you have listened to me very patiently. May I, with all the earnestness I can command, plead with you to be loyal to this mighty Gospel. All else

is secondary. It has been said that some of us in the Holy Ministry turn to social questions because we have lost our hold on the everlasting Gospel. The Dean of St. Paul's said not long ago: "What is wrong with the Church is, that the Clergy have turned their attention from the unconverted to the unemployed." You may not like that remark: if so, you will have to write to the Dean. But before you write anywhere, give a thought to the solemn warning it suggests. God forbid that in a Christian pulpit any man should speak of the suffering of our time but with tears of genuine sympathy. Yet the supreme tragedy after all is, not that men should be without work—terrible as that is,—but that man should be without God. The sad world, however, is gradually getting tired of its own pleasures, though it has little patience with our endless, and often senseless, squabbles. The field appears on all hands to be wonderfully ready for the harvest. Our age, which is in many respects the greatest in all History, is hungering for a simple, strong, sustaining and comforting Gospel, preached, it may be, without much elegance, but with convincing sincerity. This Gospel, which we have, we must hold and proclaim to the world with that tender catholicity of practical appeal which becomes a law of liberty charged with the all-embracing love of God.

And now to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost be honour and glory, dominion and power, world without end. Amen.

## VI.

### THE GOSPEL IN A MYSTERY.\*

*"But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, even the wisdom that hath been hidden, which God fore-ordained before the worlds unto our glory." I. COR. ii. 7 (R.V.).*

THE word here rendered "mystery" is, as you know, one of the great characteristic words of St. Paul's Epistles. It is a word of peculiar and varied meaning. Around it turns in part the question of the relation between the ancient Mystery Religions and St. Paul's thought and teaching. One of its original meanings, perhaps its commonest meaning in the New Testament, is what we to-day would call, not a mystery but a secret. There is a simple and clear distinction here. Both are unknown,—a mystery and a secret—but they are not unknown for the same reason. A secret is unknown because it is unrevealed; a mystery is unknown because it is incomprehensible. Once a secret is told, it ceases to be a secret; but a mystery is still a mystery though fully revealed. To the one division belongs the Call of the Gentiles, spoken of often by St. Paul as the "mystery of Christ." There was nothing in the Call of the Gentiles that was above human comprehension. In the Economy of Revelation under the Old Testa-

\* \* Preached before the National Free Church Council, at the St. Andrew's Hall, Norwich, March 12, 1914.

ment it had not been made known to the holy nation through the prophets. But once the world knew it, they understood it. They might not agree with it, but they could not fail to comprehend it. The Doctrine of the Trinity, on the other hand, belongs to another category. It was kept back from Israel; but it has now been made known in Christ, and through the Christian consciousness of the early Centuries. Yet it still remains a truth unfathomed. The light of the Spirit cannot make it plain. It is an axiom of faith and spiritual experience, not of intellectual demonstration.

This may be a later idea. When trained minds, versed in Greek Philosophy, turned their attention to the content of the Christian Revelation, they soon found in it something which, beneath all its simple appeal, baffled the mind. And there can be nothing wrong in giving a modern meaning, a present day application, to ancient words of Scripture. The Bible we regard as an Inspired Book. What Inspiration really means is a question we may not agree about. It is in itself a mystery. But it must be, as the very word suggests, a form of life. God breathed into the very documents, and the book became a living book. All living things grow, and constantly adapt themselves to changing conditions. The word of God can never grow old. As the world grows in knowledge and experience, by the living Spirit dwelling in it, God's book grows too. It suits all times. Scholars will help us by giving the exact local and literal reference in the Prophets and the Psalms, but we know that under that there lurk eternal principles,



and they are the same for every age. Granting, therefore, that strictly the word here means a thing unrevealed, a secret well kept, it is quite in keeping with the Apostle's thought when we take it to refer to the thoughts which are above our understanding. "We speak God's wisdom in a *mystery*,"—a revelation beyond our understanding.

I want, if I may, to speak this morning, in the brief hour at my command, of the *Glory and supremacy of the Gospel*. This is, after all, what we have to offer to the world, and this is what the world asks of us. Our main object is not to settle theological difficulties, nor to remove social and economic wrongs as such. We preach a Gospel,—not a philosophy, nor a policy, but a completed Redemption in Christ our Lord. And we must be jealous guardians of the prerogatives of that trust, lest, in the growing multiplicity of our organisations, the Central Gospel is over-shadowed.

## I.

The key words of the text are "*mystery*," "*wisdom*" and "*glory*." And, taking the first word, I remark, in the first place, that *the Gospel is above Reason*; for it is a mystery. By this we mean more than that the Gospel is incomprehensible to certain types of mind. We find that too in this chapter. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged." I need hardly remind you that, by the "natural man," the Apostle does not mean the low, vulgar, carnal man of sin. The natural man is, in

his own sphere, an admirable man. He is a man of intellectual and moral refinement. The natural man is the finest type of man this world can produce without a Gospel. He is the ripest fruit of Humanism,—the man of the Renaissance, apart from the Reformation. I do not suppose his case was quite the same in apostolic days as in ours. The natural man, I take it, was then outside the Church in the main. He was the critic, the Greek, who regarded the preaching of the Cross as foolishness. Nowadays, things are different. The natural man has for a long time been a Church member, often a prominent one. The natural man is an office-bearer in the Church, and it may be he sometimes preaches. He is not quite at home perhaps in a prayer meeting; but he is invaluable on a committee. But, then, we have to-day in our Churches so many more committees than prayer meetings, that his sphere is consequently enlarged. I say deliberately and in all solemnity, that one of the gravest dangers to the Christian Church in our own day, as it seems to me, is that it should be dominated by the natural man. We are terrified by statistics. We want, as the world puts it, to make things hum. The minister is harassed by dwindling congregations, and still more dwindling collections. And the Church, falling into an undignified panic, calls to her aid the natural man, and the doubtful tactics of the unregenerate world.

The Gospel is essentially spiritual. The natural man, in spite of his accomplishments in other directions, understands it not. But the Gospel is a mystery in a wider sense than simply in its relation

to the natural man. The Gospel is a mystery to the spiritual man as well; to the man in the pulpit as much as to the man in the pew. The Gospel is essentially a mystery to all. That is, for one thing, the cause of its eternal fascination for the human mind. This haunting mystery will not leave man alone. And think of the infinite resources of it. The other day I had the unusual privilege of a conversation with a Minister of the Crown on the subject of Christian preaching. He maintained that preachers of the Gospel had a great advantage over statesmen because the preachers' theme was so inexhaustible. There is certainly something in that. Think of it. Take any political question that may, for a time, move the kingdom. When you have spoken on it about a dozen times, for an hour at a time, you have said all that is known, and certainly all that is material, about it. That is the mischief in this land, the speaking is going on, but the subject has been exhausted long ago. Men soon tire of discussing the most enthralling events. When King Edward VII. died, the world was paralysed. For how long? Did it last a month or two? But the death of the Crucified Galilean has held its place in the world's thought for well nigh two thousand years. There is nothing even at this hour that holds in captivity the faith and imagination of men to the same extent. People do not agree about it. Why then cannot the world ignore it, and forget it? We have been preaching about it now, Sunday by Sunday, for two thousand years. If you ask us why we do not stop, we can only answer that we have not yet finished half

of what we have to say. And, brethren, when the last day shall dawn and the trumpet shall sound, some faithful brethren will still be at it. We show forth the Lord's death "till He come." It is a message the preaching of the ages can never exhaust.

## II.

This mystery then which has conquered the world is the revealed wisdom of God. It is not on the lines of human discovery at all. Mark that. At this time we hesitate to put a limit to the possibilities of man's inventive power. We live in a marvellous time. The conquests of science appeal to our imaginations as a kind of practical poetry. We sometimes doubt whether we are not dreaming. And, we are told, the work has only just been started. Heaven alone knows what things man may be able to do within the next fifty years. By the study of Nature, and obedience to her laws and following her suggestions, man is becoming the master of the world. Yet man never has, and never would have, discovered a Gospel. The experiment has been fairly tried. If Philosophy and Art could have saved humanity, Greece and Rome would have done so before Jerusalem was called in. But "salvation is from the Jews." The world was going further from God and from hope as it grew in wisdom. By wisdom it knew not God. The Gospel is not the result of a human discovery, but of a Divine revelation. And it should be preached as such,—with the authority that comes from knowing that we are not advancing a plausible hypothesis, but declaring the counsel of God.

Not only was the Gospel beyond the thought of man, it was equally above and beyond the thought of those higher intelligences in heavenly places, whose spiritual perceptions are supposed to be so much above our own. The angels had no conception of it. I wonder how much the angels knew of God before the world was made. But you reply, Did they not see God? I am not aware of it. We sometimes talk as if God is necessarily invisible to us as long as we are shut within the limitations and bondage of the material. But once we are through in the spiritual realm, we shall see God as we now see the mountains. I do not find that in Scripture. God is in His very essence invisible always to angels and to men, in heaven as well as on earth, "dwelling in light unapproachable."

I am not aware that there can be any visible manifestation of God even in Heaven, but only in the glorified humanity of our ascended Lord. The angels must have been always searching into His ways. How they rejoiced over the creation of the world, and sang for joy! It was to them a new book on God. This world, after all, is the Theological College the angels graduate from. There can be no revelation of God in eternity to surpass, nor indeed to equal, the revelation given in time. Heaven has nothing so great as the Incarnation and the Cross, and these are facts of earth. "To the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known *through the Church* the manifold wisdom of God." Not only is the Gospel the highest revelation of God to men, it is

absolutely the highest of all. It is what the angels desire to look into.

At the same time, the Gospel is so simple in its appeal that no man need miss the way of salvation through it. St. Paul revelled in the paradoxes of the Faith. He was a great man; and, therefore, did not mind appearing inconsistent. It is your small man who always prides himself upon his consistency. But, any man who says the same thing for ten years is hopeless. If there is no new emphasis, no fresh point of view, in fact no new view altogether, we have ceased to grow. Our duty is to be true to the manysidedness of infinite truth, knowing that all true things must be ultimately one. St. Paul tells the Ephesians that they must "know the love of Christ," and yet, in the same sentence, adds, "which passeth knowledge." Our salvation comes through knowing what can never be known. Let not the mystery hinder you. Does it hinder us with anything else? Why, all things are full of mystery! How the leading men of Science at the British Association bow in humility before problems they cannot solve. Would you expect the highest ways of God to be free from mystery? A photographer told me the other day that his own art was a perfect mystery to him. Have you ever met a tired workman who will not avail himself of an Electric Car to take him home, because he knows nothing of electricity? I think you would know in what institution to put such a man. I am not here to explain the Gospel. If I could explain it, or if any man could explain it, it would not be worth preaching. We proclaim it. We

declare in the name and on the authority of God himself, that there is beyond your reason, but within your reach, a power which, if you take hold of it, will take you home. Try it. We recommend it on the testimony of the ages. It is not your theory of the Atonement that will save you, but your faith. I call upon you to trust your souls to this saving mystery.

## III.

This mystery, though above reason is yet, *in the highest and truest sense, rational*, for it is the wisdom of God. Things above reason are not necessarily irrational. A mystery is here the ultimate wisdom. It is the original, fundamental, formative wisdom "foreordained before the ages." It is the well-thought-out plan of God. It is not an afterthought. The second Adam was before the first. Adam, and the world he was made in, were created in Christ. Christ is the Alpha. Creation was only an instalment of the purposes of God. The Incarnation and the Atonement are the foundations of all the great cosmic superstructure. They are the explanation, the justification, of the world and of Providence. The Architect draws the plan of a great civic, educational or ecclesiastical building. Only a part, it may be, can be finished at a time. It is added to as the money come in, until the original idea is completed. The Cross is at the heart of all that God made. It is the wisdom before the worlds. It follows, therefore, that man was made for the Gospel. Nothing else can touch and explain and satisfy the

deepest cravings of his soul. We had a great Missionary meeting last night; and those of you who were there remember how we were told that the Gospel, when plainly and sympathetically proclaimed, meets a response in all hearts. This is one of the highest proofs of its supernatural authority. It is so human, that it must be Divine.

There was once in Babylon a king given to dreams, and his dreams were a source of constant trouble to the wise men of his court. One night he dreamt, and quickly forgot, we are told, what he had dreamt about. He summoned his wise men, and told them; "You have a double duty to-day. You have to tell me, first of all, what I dreamt about, and then you have to explain to me what the dream meant." His advisers thought themselves particularly fortunate that day. They said to themselves: "Since he does not remember what he dreamt, we can tell him anything." So we can picture how they would assemble in solemn conclave to concoct a royal dream. One comes forward to the royal presence, and gives his version. He had not, however, proceeded far before the old king, looking through him, ordered him to stop. "I have no idea," he said, "what my dream was: but it wasn't that, I am quite certain." A second tried, being more familiar with the usual lines of the kingly imagination. "No," the king replied to him, "not that. I have forgotten, certainly; but yet I should know the old dream, if I heard it." Daniel finally came—the prophet of the Lord—and as he spoke, light came to the king's eyes. "Ah," he said, "that's my dream." As the prophet spoke, it



came up from the depth of his consciousness, and though he had forgotten it, he knew it to be true.

Man is an old king, who has forfeited his kingdom and is haunted by a dream. He knows that this material world is not his ancestral home. He has hopes and aspirations above the visible, and a mystic yearning for some great, unknown good. His strange greatness accounts for his divine discontent. The world offers him gold, pleasure, power, pomp. He takes them all, but he is satisfied by none. Philosophy brings him all the wisdom of the schools; but his soul cries out for a living God. To such a man, with open mind and trusting heart, comes the Gospel. By it God interprets the man to himself, and fills and sways his soul. The Gospel is humanity's "Lost Chord," to which the heart responds with its "grand Amen." Have you ever heard it so? and, when you heard, did your heart obey? It vitally concerns you; for it is the only condition of the glory to be revealed. Viewed in this light, our lives are already bathed in unseen glory. Time is a narrow valley between two Eternities,—the one behind and the one before us. Soon the two will merge, and Time shall be no more. Let us master the lessons of our mortal life in the light of the hidden wisdom of God. Walking by faith and not by sight, trusting, through the friendly darkness, to the guiding hand of "Christ and Him crucified," may we hold to our message. "Let a man so account of us as of ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."

## VII.

### THE SUPREMACY OF LOVE.

*"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."*—  
I CORINTHIANS xiii. 13.

It is surely remarkable that the greatest eulogy of love in all the literature of the world should be found in one of the Epistles of St. Paul, and in an Epistle to a Church which appears to have been markedly lacking in this grace. We regard St. Paul usually as the Apostle of Faith, while for teaching on love we turn to St. John. And yet some of the deepest things on faith in the New Testament are to be found in the writings of St. John. There is some advantage, and at the same time some danger, in the modern method of assigning certain aspects of Christian teaching to the individual culture of different apostles. Every apostle has his own message; and yet, all being led and enlightened by one Spirit, their ideas constantly overlap and intermix. The faith of which one apostle more particularly writes is yet a faith of which love, the characteristic subject of another, is the source and the sphere.

By love—rendered charity in the A.V.—we are to mean the Spirit of CHRIST in the heart and life of men. Not His teaching in mind and creed; and not the adorning of our lives by some of the moral excellences of His character. CHRIST came to introduce a new Spirit into the world. This Spirit has

transformed all the ethical conceptions of humanity by its new revelation of the Fatherhood of God. The heathen had already an amazingly fine idea of the good, and it is invigorating for our souls to be bathed occasionally in these pagan waters. The only criticism that need now be made is that, in the heathen world, the *tender* virtues were neither appreciated nor acknowledged. They were probably regarded as unmanly and even effeminate. The world in those times honoured neither woman nor womanly things. Christianity as an ethical faith corrected and changed all this. The Beatitudes—so simple, yet so revolutionary,—meant a complete reversal of human opinions on the relative value of ethical types. The weak and tender were declared supreme. The shedding of tears was shown to be a nobler and diviner thing than the shedding of blood. The highest strength is not revenge, but love. And the Cross was the great and crowning vindication of love as the ethical ideal and inspiration. Heathenism said: Let every brave man hate, and, if he can, kill his enemy. Christianity taught: Love your enemies, and count it the highest privilege if you are called upon to die for their sakes. Thus love was historically enthroned on the Cross.

Our subject is—

#### THE SUPREMACY OF LOVE.

St. Paul here proves this in two ways. By showing

- I. *The value which Love confers upon other gifts.*
- II. *The abiding value it has in itself.*

I. The Apostle in the opening verses of the chapter indicates how other gifts, though in themselves priceless, are utterly without value apart from Love. This point ought to be studied by us with grave searchings of heart. For we are shown, in vivid words, how far a man can reach, how many precious things he may possess, how high he may stand in the estimation of the whole Church, and yet, through lack of this indispensable principle of action,—Love,—be, in the end, ‘nothing.’

The Apostle takes these gifts in an ascending scale, divided into three distinct groups—the highest things the world can boast of—to show how love crowns them all.

i. *Natural endowments.* By these we understand the gifts and graces by which God enriches the minds of men. It is the province of education not to create, but, as the word suggests, to discover, marshal and lead out these inherent powers. St. Pauls mentions three of them: the power to speak, the power to know, and the power to do.

(a), The gift of *speech*. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels.” This was the most marvellous and precious gift in the estimation of the Corinthian Church. In St. Paul’s opinion it was the lowest and most elementary. This gift, however, is not to be despised. Gifts, as a rule, are only despised by the people who do not possess them. To be able to speak at all marks man as higher than the beasts; to speak with greater elegance and force puts one man above another. St.

Paul had this gift in a marked degree. There is no power which carries with it greater opportunities for good, and, consequently, graver responsibilities than this strange power of permanently influencing the minds of men, and, may be, the course of events, by speech. Nothing will ever supplant this. It is the natural way of impressing men. Literature at best is but an artificial and secondary way of human intercourse. The gift of speech is God's chosen way to evangelize the world. The victory of the Church is to come through the "foolishness of preaching." The Apostle is anxious to deal fairly with such a high gift. "If I speak with the tongues of men," i.e., if I could express myself with equal freedom in all the languages of the world, and with all the combined gifts of all the orators it ever knew, and even if, in addition to human power at its highest, I had also the eloquence of the angels, thus combining the fluency of two worlds—yet, without the Spirit of Christ, it would all be mere empty noise, a noise without a message or a meaning. It is really intolerable noise,—without Love. But, "if we speak the truth in love (Eph. iv. 15) we grow up into Him in all things which is the head even Christ."

(b) Then there is the power to *know*. "If I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge." To know is better than merely to talk however eloquently. With the modern subdivision of research, knowledge is becoming more and more diffused and scattered. It takes many experts to cover a wide area of knowledge, as New-

man explains in his "Idea of a University." A University contains a collection of men, each supreme in his own branch, so that, taken together, they may represent the whole realm of thought and research. But here we have one man who knows all the mysteries. He is a complete University in himself, filling all imaginable chairs with equal distinction. He knows not only what is actually known but all that is knowable. This man gets as near omniscience as the finite can get. Yet, apart from love, he is nothing.

(c) Next: the power to do—the gift of action. "If I had all faith so that I could remove mountains." This is a still higher gift than those already named. As to know is greater than to talk, so to do is greater than to know. Thought and speech are, after all, for action. Life is the final justification of all intellectual aspirations. We are in the world to achieve something—to create or to remove. This power of action is here called "faith." This may be called, whether correctly or not, a kind of miraculous faith, one of the characteristic gifts of the Spirit to the early Church. Our Lord Himself had spoken of it (St. Mark xvii. 20). Here this strange power is at its highest. "Mountains" are attacked and moved away, not by any of the devices of science, but by the mere word of command. This is something greater than Hannibal's historic achievement. He *crossed* the Alps. Here the mountains are *removed*. Not only is difficulty overcome but the impossible is accomplished. As the knowledge referred to borders on omniscience, so

the power here is practically omnipotence. Yet, if the man who has even this, lacks love, he is nothing. So much for eloquence, knowledge and will-power—the idols of our age.

ii. The second group may be called the *moral achievements*. This is a higher world, and not merely a higher section of the same world. The moral is greater than the intellectual, and achievement means not only original endowment, but what is added to it by man's own moral striving. The morally great will be great on the Judgment Day—that day, as Mozley calls it, of “the reversal of human judgments.” “The first shall be last, and the last first.” Two acts of conspicuous moral distinction are mentioned to illustrate this:

(1) “*If I give all my goods to feed the poor.*” This is so much greater than removing mountains, or mastering sciences, or talking like angels, that it belongs to a higher order of things. This is a moral act, which, of its kind, is of the highest merit. The power to give away is, in itself, one of the greatest of gifts. It is greater than the ability to acquire. “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” To many who have the gift of making money is denied the power of spending it rationally, or giving it away to further some worthy end. There are some who would give, if they possessed anything they could give. Others have more than they need, but they simply cannot part with it. We should pay heed to the perfect picture given here, in this short, simple sentence, of a charitable heart. This man gives all,

not a tenth or any part, but everything he has. No man can give more. Like the poor widow in the Gospel, the last mite is subscribed. Then notice that he gives it all *himself*. He does the sharing with his own hands, not through a steward. Giving by proxy is easier; it is really like performing an operation on a man when the man himself is absent. But this man gives with his own hand. Such the delight he takes in the work that he will not entrust it to any one else. It is a congenial and enjoyable occupation which he reserves for himself. So his heart must be in it. And even more: this man doles it out in small doses, as the word used here implies. He bestows it upon the poor, one by one, as they may need. The verb signifies a decision arrived-at in a moment, but the process of carrying it out took time. It was not a case of endowing the poor, but of constantly feeding them. This is a high and keen test. To give a large sum by cheque is often easy, even to a man without much liberality of heart. He does not actually see the money go. But to prolong the agony of it, by constant giving, with one's own hand, until all is gone, tasks the heart to the utmost. Cheques are a very useful modern method of extracting money painlessly from miserly men towards good objects. But this man takes no anaesthetic; he parts joyfully with all his money in actual small coins. And he did it all in his life. It was not a bequest in a will. It is strange that such a thing could even be done at all without love. Yet evidently it can; and though it is a triumph of charity, without love it profiteth nothing.



(2) *The gift of complete self surrender, even unto death itself.* "If I give my body to be burned." This is probably the correct reading, though there is another which the Revised Version puts in the margin, "that I may glory." This is the supreme sacrifice. No man would do more for any cause. It implies the willing, deliberate surrender of one's life. Many of the martyrs would probably have escaped death if they could. Man is not called upon to throw, nor, in a sense, is he justified in throwing, his life away even in the worthiest cause. When a man cannot escape without denying the faith, then he ought to die. This man of St. Paul's "*gives*" his body. He courts death. Here this is done, it seems, by fire. More often than Christians perished by the sword. In whichever way it is done, it is the very utmost man could do. Yet, if even such noble deeds are done from selfish, doubtful motives, they can have no real merit at all. They simply stand for formal obedience, without love. And love is the true fulfilling of the Law.

iii. The final group is that of *spiritual grace*. This is the highest of all—the realm of the *twice-born*. Here we have the grandest peaks of God's holy mountain-tops—faith, hope, love; and the greatest of these is love.

II. Love is supreme when we consider, again, *the abiding worth of it in itself.*

What are the characteristics of this love which is greater than all? The Apostle finds it easier to define it by negations. It is often less difficult to

describe a thing by saying what it is not, than by endeavouring to say what it is. To many men love may be unknown: opposites of love are known to all (verses 4—7); to know how great a power love is, consider how things are where love is not. Love is, first of all, magnanimous in its estimate of men and things. It "suffereth long." It will not easily believe the worst of anyone: it waits for the further light that may justify things. Love always puts the best construction possible on all actions. And it is *kind*. This virtue is characteristically Christian. There is in true love the quaintest originality in its ways of service, as illustrated by the woman who washed our Lord's feet with her tears, and dried them with the hair of her head. Love is never at a loss for opportunities and means to serve. And love "*envieth*" not. We are not to envy a rival, who may be in the same way of business as ourselves, and whose prosperity may in a sense hinder our own. Some may harm us intentionally, and others unwittingly. Love, also "vaunteth not itself," without, because it is not "puffed up," within. "It doth not behave itself unseemly." Love has an intuition of rightness even when without the outward, written injunction. Because it is the negation of all forms of selfishness, "it is not (easily) provoked." It neither takes in, nor lets out, scandal (Psalm xv.). It "beareth all things," which in the margin reads "it *covereth* all things." We have the same idea elsewhere, "Love covereth a multitude of sins." It is not of the nature of love to expose, but to hide, as a mother hides the sins of

the prodigal. It is of a trusting nature, and "believeth all things" that are capable of rational belief. Then the Apostle touches a note which is infinitely pathetic. Love "hopes" when it fails to believe; and "endures" even when hope itself has died within the heart.

And, above all, it *abides*. "Love never faileth." Gifts will vanish, as those graces of the Spirit to the original Church have vanished. Knowledge, being at the best partial and provisional, will be merged at last in a fuller contact with Truth as it really is. As a child grows out of his toys, so man will grow out of the limitations of time. But love abides for ever like the word of God; and it will be the ultimate ideal when death is swallowed up in victory, and we shall know even as we are known.

Finally then, my brethren, the essence of all goodness is Love. "God is love." And this love is not a natural endowment, but the gift of the Spirit. The love of God must be "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost." "Faith" and "hope" are, after all, only forms of eternal goodness, suitable to the conditions of this life. They follow us, as "goodness and mercy" followed the Psalmist, like twin-angels of guidance and protection until the day dawn. Then, faith, losing its present form in sight, and hope, in perfect possession, all that have helped the pilgrim on his long progress will be done away with, and there will remain only the abiding love of God in Christ our Lord, from which no power, visible or invisible, can separate the soul.

## VIII.

### MERCY REVEALED IN JUDGMENT.\*

*"I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face."*—  
HOSEA v. 15.

THESE words, as you see, are words of grave warning, and they were spoken at a time of great and general decay. God is here threatening to leave His people, not simply to correct them, not simply to punish them, but to abandon them altogether. "I will go and return to my place." The chosen nation by this time had fallen a victim to the subtle temptations of Canaan, and these were greater and more difficult to overcome than the combined perils of Egypt, and the wilderness and Babylon. It was a greater change from the wilderness to Canaan than from Egypt to the wilderness, because it really meant a complete transformation in this people's mode of life. Hitherto they had been a pastoral, a nomadic people, and now they develop suddenly into a fixed, settled, agricultural community. They emerged from the privations of the wilderness into the peace and plenty

\* Council Sermon preached in the Albert Hall, Manchester, at the Twentieth National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches, March 9, 1915.

of the Land of Promise, and all this was very new to them. The romance of the wilderness was disappearing, for no nation since the world was made had lived as this people had lived for forty years. They had depended for everything on the direct intervention of God. The food they ate, and the water they drank, and their clothing, came as direct gifts from heaven day by day. But now all this romance had disappeared: the manna ceased; the water from the rock was stopped, and the pillar of cloud evaporated. These people were thrown suddenly on their own resources. Now there is an element of danger in every sudden change, even though it be a change for the better. The responsibilities that came upon this people now were altogether strange to them.

They had a land to cultivate, and they knew nothing about agriculture. The Jew knows nothing about agriculture yet, and he knew less than nothing then. And so the Canaanites who dwelt in the land became their teachers, and that was the initial error. This people, who had dwelt apart, had now to mix with other men who worshipped other gods. I don't suppose the Canaanites knew anything more than the Hebrews from the scientific point of view, but what they lacked in science they made up in superstition. I suppose their theology was something like this: The great universal, invisible Spirit who made heaven and earth—granted that such a Being exists—is too great, too majestic, to be the proper object of human worship; He is too far off for human prayer or praise to reach Him; He made

the world, and, in a sense, He sustains the world, but the direct management of it He has sub-let to a number of minor under-lords, who manage the world for Him, and, presumably, at first in His name; and these, I suppose for convenience' sake, subdivided their responsibilities. One of them took charge of the corn, another of the cattle, and a third took charge of the vines. And the Canaanites told these invaders: "Now, if you want to live and prosper in this land, the first thing you have to do is to conciliate these supplementary gods." And I suppose these Hebrews' ideas were elementary at the best, and perhaps they thought of Jehovah as a great wilderness-God whose home was on Mount Sinai. At any rate, the direct result was that the sense of God vanished completely from the heart and life of the people of God. Hence the tremendous warning of the text: "I will go and return to my place."

Now what I want to show is the element of love in this terrible warning. For, after all, we must remember that the God who speaks here speaks in His love. He was the Covenant God to His people. He liked Ephraim and He loved him all the time, and never loved him more than when He was discussing with Himself the question of giving him up. The people were however dear to the heart of God; and He wanted this tremendous message to be given them very tenderly. And he selected the most tender-hearted of the prophets to convey this terrible message to His people; for all good men are not equally tender-hearted. God has stern men to say

stern things, but they often lack the sympathetic touch—the human sympathetic touch which the love of God demands. This prophet went through a series of personal sorrows that prepared him to preach the love of God in a sympathetic way; and we have in the text mercy revealed in judgment—the love of God speaking in a threat. It is very easy to see the love of God in a promise; but here we have the love of God in a warning, and in a terrible warning.

I can well imagine that many people are asking to-day: Is God now leaving Europe; is He abandoning the whole thing? I confess it looks like it.

It is a long cry back to the quiet Sabbath morning when St. Paul first preached the Gospel on the Continent of Europe; and one would have expected by this time that it would have made the condition of things we now see in Europe impossible; but here it is; and what does it mean? Are these ancient civil nations about to perish? Such things have happened. Civilisation has been marching in certain fixed directions, leaving the empires behind like broken ships on the sands. There was Egypt, and Assyria, and Rome—they have all disappeared. Why should not Europe disappear? Is God about to give Europe up? I have no hesitation personally about that question, but let that pass.

I want to consider with you how God does leave a people, when He does; and we shall be able to apply this consoling message to the circumstances of our own day.

It is immaterial, for the point I have in hand, whether we think of God as leaving a nation, or leaving a Church, or leaving an individual man—the great principles are the same; He always leaves in the same way, whether He leaves a man, a nation, or a Church. And how is it done? I should like to be able to show something which I find here, in the illuminating paragraphs I have read, about how God abandons a people. I will try to make my points as simple as I can, for I take it this diet of worship is set apart for the simple preaching of the Gospel. Now, I have a Gospel, though whether I can preach it is another question.

How does God leave a people? In the first place: *God never leaves a people until they have, first of all, left Him.* I want that fixed in your mind. It is a well-known thing, but reflect upon it again. God never takes the initiative, so if there is any leave-taking going to happen in England, or in Europe, we have started it. God never acts on irrational impulse. He is not like the heathen god. There is always a sense of terror in heathen minds, for they never know what their god is going to take up next. They never know how soon it may, like a child tired of its toys, throw the thing away. There is no rationality, no security; but the prophets always preached that Jehovah was above change; and that was the reason why the sons of Jacob had not been destroyed. God never leaves a people until they leave Him. He had a double quarrel with this people. First of all: with their leaders. "The princes of Judah are like them that



remove the landmarks." Take that in its widest sense—not to mean the princes of the royal blood, but the leaders of thought among the people; whether they were priests or prophets, statesmen or poets, literary men or newspaper men, the men who shape and direct the opinions of the people—they are, for our purposes now, the princes of Judah. And the princes of Judah were tampering with the landmarks. Now that, perhaps, does not convey much to us, because our boundary walls are not so easily removed. But the princes of Judah had no regard for the fixed landmarks. What are the landmarks?

Law, custom, creed, treaty—you know them—the things that define the limits of a man's right. I am not speaking of any nation; but if you have casually heard of a nation that is not clear as to where the boundary line is, and who may regard a treaty, if it defines the boundary lines, as of no particular importance—if you know of a nation like that—I would solemnly say, it looks like following the princes of Judah.

Great is the responsibility of leadership. Most men go astray because they are badly led. We go astray like sheep; there is always a leading sheep, and there never was a time in the history of the world when we ought to pray more for those who lead us than to-day. A nation that is cut adrift from God is an international peril. Any empire let loose among the empires of the world without being fixed in God is a danger to the whole world. The princes

of Judah had no fixed principles. They tampered with the landmarks, and God was displeased.

The second part of His quarrel was this: His quarrel with the mass of the people. Ephraim is oppressed in judgment because he was content to walk after the Commandment. Mark the word "content." God does not blame them for following the Commandment; in a sense it was the law of the country. It was the princes of Judah that made the law; but what grieved the heart of God was, when He remembered what He had done for their forefathers, to see the people obeying their godless leaders so willingly. Leaders and people had gone astray, and these are the men whom God leaves. He will leave no others. He will only leave those who are deliberately leaving Him. Let us solemnly search our hearts.

And now I come to my second point, in order to show again how God's love predominates, even in this terrible judgment. *God never leaves any but those who have left Him.* Again, *God will not leave even such until their redemption is hopeless.* These people now worship idols with an undivided heart; but they did not start at that point. Their apostasy had been developing for a considerable time, and God saw it when it was only a germ. He saw the first beginnings of it before the people were themselves aware of it; but He did not give them up when He saw the signs of apostasy beginning in the heart—not indeed until every attempt that God's wisdom and love would devise had been tried to

bring their soul back again. He never leaves even those who leave Him until their case has proved hopeless.

I say that because I see in the paragraph that God made two attempts to bring these people back to Himself, and both failed. The first was a gradual, quiet attempt. "I will be unto Ephraim as a moth and to the house of Judah as rottenness." "As a moth": it is a terrible idea—the Almighty entering into the life of a man or a nation as a destroying power.

It does not matter what the man tries to do—God meets him and paralyses him. No matter what a nation plans, God meets it and thwarts it. Some inward power devours the strength of the soul like a moth. The moth is a very weak and insignificant thing. A child is not afraid of the moth; but still the moth will do terrible destruction if left alone, and the Eastern was in mortal terror of the moth, because his wealth consisted, as a rule, in fabrics and costly raiment. It was a point in favour of heaven to the minds of those who listened to Jesus Christ that there would be no moth there to corrupt. The moth ranked with the thief as greatly to be feared—quiet, gradual, deadly. We drift into sin as we drift into old age. It is very hard for a man to decide at what moment or day he actually becomes an old man. The case generally is that a man has been old a good many years before he gives any consideration to the question at all. The prophet says that Ephraim had greyness sprinkled on his

head and did not know it. He was an old man before his time. It was a quiet, stern judgment from God that was working atrophy. Well the moth as the context shows—answered the purpose; for gradually Ephraim began to feel he was not quite as well as he used to be, and he decided to consult a physician. God meant to drive him to that; but still Ephraim went astray, because he went to the wrong physician. “When Ephraim saw his sickness and Judah his wound, then went Ephraim to the Assyrian”—not to God. They sought help, but not from Him who could have helped them. The moth had failed. It did not drive them to God, and so Ephraim fell short of God’s purpose. The moth failed in its mission.

Now what is the result? When God’s minor appeals fail, He comes in a more terrible judgment. If you ignore a quiet warning—and God always gives a quiet warning to begin with—a more fearful warning will follow. The next words are these: “For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion.” I cannot pretend to be able to show you how fearful such words are, when we reflect that they were spoken by God, and spoken to His people—“and as a young lion to the house of Judah. I will tear and go away; I will take away and none shall deliver.” It would be a pagan and unscriptural idea if I were to suggest that God in His great providence has brought about this frightful war in order to teach His fear to the country; but I do say this: the War being upon us, the schools of God are working full

time; we are being gradually taught, and some things we were forgetting are coming back to our consciences. In our years of peace and plenty the hearts of men were not fixed on heaven. Materialism, luxury, sport, pleasure, were the idols of the people. We are already getting out of that. Self-sacrifice is now enthroned where luxury used to be; and God is teaching the nation to learn righteousness when the judgments of God are abroad in the earth. Why is it? Because God in His love is redeeming the world. God is doing something to redeem even in the most appalling experiences of men and of nations. God is always the Redeemer. He never gives up a nation until every means has been tried to bring the heart of the nation back to Him again.

Thirdly: We have seen that God leaves only those who leave Him; and that God will not leave even such until their redemption is hopeless. Once more: *Even when their case is hopeless, He will not, even then, depart from them immediately.* He will give them ample warning. For a long time He will tell them, "I will go," and still He does not go. The God that was about to abandon Israel was in no hurry to do so. Such is the lingering love of God. He will not give up even the abandoned in haste. The Word of God seems to me to be full of this great and consoling truth, that God is in no hurry to give up even the hopeless. The historical value of these Old Testament stories is, in my opinion, of very little importance; but they are here for a purpose—to picture the love of God. Take the

story of the Deluge: it is very human. You may rest assured that God did not make up His mind to drown the world until every attempt had been made to bring the souls of men back to Him again. Noah was told to build an ark; but God said: Do not be in a hurry. I have an idea that God was watching him day by day lest he should finish that ark too soon. The world was doomed, but God was in no hurry to execute the judgment. What a time He took to do it! He entrusts the building of the ark to one but little experienced in such work, and He gives unlimited time. In fact it took 120 years. A recent American writer is puzzled as to what Noah could have been doing all that time, when a competent man would have put the ark together in ten days. Noah took long over a century. It was that God grieved to see that ark approaching completion. God did not hasten to destroy. God goes one day down to Sodom, "because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrha is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now and"—destroy. No! "I will go down and *see*": "see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it." God who knew all interposes delay, not because Sodom was not ready for fire; but because God was not anxious for the speedy kindling of it.

"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down." How? The God who had just opened the Jordan could certainly have demolished them with a word. But it was not done so. They fell down "after they were compassed about *seven days*." An old

Puritan quaintly remarks that God took one day more to pull down the walls of Jericho than it took Him to create the world!

So with Nineveh. He would not destroy that wicked city until He had sent Jonah there "forty days" in advance to say He was going to do so. And Jonah knew well that He would not even then keep His word. "Was not this my saying when I was yet in my country . . . ; for I knew that thou art a gracious God and full of compassion, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy?"

And why is the Day of Judgment delayed? It is strangely over-due. They expected it in apostolic times. God is long-suffering, not willing that any man should perish, but that every man should come to repentance. He has prepared a hell for devils and angels; but He has not prepared it for you; and you shall not go there if He can help it.

Lastly. *When God does eventually depart—mark this—it is not finally and for ever. He leaves an open door behind Him.* This comes out here in two words. He is going: but He tells this people whither He is going. He says, "I go and return to My place." That was the Temple, I believe. In the language of our own dispensation, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself. 'I am only going to my place; but,' he said, 'here is the address, and if some day you feel you cannot manage without the ancient God of your fathers, just you send one word to this address, and I will be back at

once.' He leaves the address and the conditions of His return, and they are within the reach of all. "I go to My own place until they acknowledge their offence." He does not ask for atonement. He Himself has made the atonement in Jesus Christ His Son, our Lord. He tells this people: "I do not want atonement; what I want from you is repentance; and if you have not repentance, I will give you that, for Christ is ascended on high to give repentance and the remission of sins."

Is not this a glorious Gospel to think about as we ponder the manifold problems of our own day? He may go and never return; but He has not gone yet, and will not go unless you drive Him from you. As you go back to your churches, will you tell the people in His name that there are no signs as yet that He has departed, and He is not anxious to depart if you are anxious He should stay? Ask Him to remain. God will never abandon a nation bowed before Him in penitence and prayer.



## IX.

### JUDAS.

*"To take the place in this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas fell away, that he might go to his own place."*—ACTS I. 25 (R.V.).

THESE words speak of two very different "places" in connection with one and the same man. The first is a place of sacred dignity and responsibility: "a place in this ministry and apostleship." To this apostolic vacancy a successor was about to be chosen by lot. The other is somewhat vaguely described as the man's "own" place. It is clear, therefore, that the ministry and apostleship was not this man's rightful place. He was an usurper there. The man and the place did not correspond. He was more fitted for the place he went to than for the place he fell from; so he was driven by some strange, irresistible power from the sacred surroundings in which he had once turned, and sent to his own place.

We are perhaps in danger often of making of this man a problem instead of a warning, of asking questions when we should be taking lessons. The strange character of Judas, and his tragic fate, exemplify two great principles, which underlie the life of our Lord and were operative in the lives of all with whom He came in contact, and have been in full operation throughout the whole of human history.

The one is that all that happened took place according to the pre-ordained will of God, the other, that every man who had a part in the tragedy knew in his own heart that he was, at the same time, a free and responsible being. The only Teacher who could harmonise these two principles, apparently, at any rate, so contradictory, was our Lord Himself. He however left them, simply placing added emphasis upon each. What He left undone, we may not dare to attempt. It is clear, however, that neither of them can be denied.

We leave the Problem then, and turn to the Lesson. From these words we find that

I. *It is possible for a bad man to turn, and turn with distinction, in the most sacred circles.*

II. *The tendency of the sacred surroundings is to develop, rather than to check, the sin of such a man.*

III. *There is at work in God's universe a law according to which every man is ultimately driven to the surroundings that suit his character—to "his own place."*

I. *It is possible for a bad man to turn, and turn with distinction, in the most sacred circles.* Here we have a traitor among the apostles, a man whom Jesus calls a "devil" in the holy ministry and apostleship. In a memorable passage St. Paul, expressing a sublime mood of humility and penitence, describes himself as the "chief of sinners." Judas would never have said that. Still, by universal con-

sent, the chief of sinners is the betrayer of our Lord. "One of *you* shall betray me." It is no wonder that our Lord was troubled in spirit—not one of the crowd, not one of the Romans, but one of "you," a man who had been reckoned among our Lord's closest friends. There are sins the world without cannot commit; only a disciple can betray. No soul in heaven had greater privileges when on earth than he. I have said that he must not be looked at merely as a problem. But still he is a problem, and one of the greatest problems in human personality. It is easy to ask; it is impossible to explain. For example,

(a), *why did such a man come to Jesus at all?* The two characters seem to be so hopelessly unlike. What had they in common? How were they attracted to each other at all? And it was not a chance meeting. Judas came from afar. Where he came from, we know not. But he was in all probability not a Galilean. He was the only one among the Twelve who could lay claim to any culture. He was the nearest approach to a scholar among them.

(b) *Having come, and having attached himself as a disciple to Jesus, why was he selected by the Master for this ministry and apostleship?* Many followed Christ from all manner of motives. All manner of men came. But this man came into the inner circle, and that not through any scheming of his own, but because Christ deliberately selected and called him. We should naturally expect when a choice was made by the infallible Christ Himself, of twelve men, for such a stupendous work, there would have been no

mistake in the selection. To the Twelve was to be entrusted the evangelisation of the world. Yet our Lord's eye fell on this man, and he was numbered among the Twelve. Why? I am not aware of any explanation given in the New Testament. Some suggest that perhaps he was such a plausible man that our Lord did not know him. As the self-emptying Son of God on earth He had only the natural keenness of His human mind to guide Him. So He was mistaken in this man. I fail to find much help in this explanation. It only changes the difficulty: it does not solve it. Again the evangelist says definitely that Jesus knew "from the beginning" who should betray Him. Yet He made the traitor an apostle. I offer no explanation; the New Testament offers none; but I venture to make two remarks.

(1) *Christ sees the best in every man; and is always willing to give the worst man a chance.* Originally no doubt, there was fine material in this man. He was not from the beginning what he ultimately became. No man is so. To say that the principle of goodness became incarnate in Christ, and the principle of sin in Judas, is not a fair statement. Christ saw what he might have been.

(2) It contributed to the revelation of the glory of the Son of God—to the manifestation to the world of what He really was—that *He should be followed and watched by a man who had no sympathy with Him.* I mean it was an additional proof, if such were needed, of the absolute blamelessness of His

character. No one can say that His friends have concocted tales about Him which were not true. It might be suggested that we have no picture of Him except as He appeared to the uncritical eyes of those who were blinded by devotion, and who were too loyal to speak of faults even if they knew of any. In answer to that, hear the Traitor. If he could have recalled anything Jesus had said, or anything Jesus had done, which would to some extent help to silence the clamourings of his awakened conscience after he had betrayed Him, how glad he would have been? But he knew of nothing. The traitor threw down the Thirty Pieces of Silver in despair, exclaiming, "I have betrayed *innocent blood*," and went and hanged himself. Christ is sinless in the eyes of friend and foe.

(3) But this man was more than an ordinary Apostle. He was no cipher among the Twelve, *but he held a position of trust and honour*. There was but one office, and he filled it. He was the Treasurer; and such, presumably, was his reputation that they felt no need of a Secretary or of an Auditor. One old book calls him the "chief of the apostles." He was certainly a distinguished man. And why all this, if not to show us how high a man may climb in the Church of Christ without the fear of God, or the love of Christ, in his heart at all?

II. *The tendency of the sacred surroundings is to develop, rather than to check, the sin of such a man.* The place he drifted into was "his own place." To be a great sinner one needs in some sense to be

a great man. Some natures are too shallow to be very great either as sinners or as saints. There is no corruption like the corruption of the best. Judas was a remarkable man, and as a sinner he stands foremost, with unenviable distinction. Dante in the *Inferno* puts him in that lowest pit where Satan dwells—the chief sinners of eternity and of time. As our Lord made the somewhat common name “Jesus” too sacred to be used ever after, so this man made the apostolic name “Judas” the equivalent of what is most despicable in the crimes of the world. His sin cannot be repeated, in form; but sin, in essence, is always the betraying of Christ and the crucifying of Him afresh. What manner of man then was he?

(a) *He was a man who loved and cherished sin in his heart, but was able to hide it in his outward life.* To sin after all is an Art; to sin for a lifetime without once being caught is high art of its kind. The Spartans used to punish men not for doing bad acts, but for doing them so clumsily as to be found out. Our Lord was charitable to the publicans and sinners of His day. They were the blunderers. They had none of that Art of sin which conceals. If they fell into sin, all the world knew. His most fierce denunciations were reserved for the Pharisees and the Scribes. They were Artists in sin. Any fool can be drunk and disorderly in the public street. Some men's true characters are not known until after they are dead. Sin must be fought and conquered within and without. Saul was sent to destroy the Amalekites. The strange and weird com-

mission was that he was to kill them all, sparing neither young nor old. He, however, only obeyed in part. And when Saul dies on the battlefield we read that it was one of the sons of Amalek that killed him. Saul spared the Amalekites, but the Amalekite did not spare him. A man may spare his sin, but his sin will not spare him. Your secret sin will find you out, and will be your end.

(b) *He was a man ruled and driven by evil principles, not a man caught by sudden temptations.* It is a comforting reflection that God can and does make a difference. He makes allowances. That was why David in the agony of his soul wanted to "fall into the hands of God." For His traitor, however, no allowances are possible. Compare him with two other men mentioned in the same circumstances. One is Pontius Pilate. He was a cynic and a Roman, but pre-eminently a weak man. His convictions were sound. He knew Jesus to be innocent. And his wife, with true feminine instinct, had warned him: "Have thou nothing to do with that righteous man." Yet Pilate wavered, because he feared the crowd. He suggested a compromise, anxious to do, not his duty, but the will of the people. Simon Peter, on the other hand, was impulsive. His sudden enthusiasms were magnificent, but his relapses were disastrous. He declared he would not deny his Lord even if he had to die for it. But Jesus knew him better than he knew himself. Satan never gave Peter any previous notice of a coming onslaught. His communications were cut before he knew. Yet Jesus loved and trusted him. "The Lord turned and

looked upon Peter," with reproof it may be, certainly with comprehension and forgiveness. The Traitor had no such redeeming traits. His soul was wrong throughout, and the very presence of Christ developed and ripened his sin.

III. *There is at work in God's universe a law according to which every man is ultimately driven to the surroundings that suit his character—to "his own place."* "From which Judas felt that he might go to his own place." All men will find their "own place" at last. There is a stern, self-acting law in constant operation to rectify the inconsistencies of our present life. The universe is, after all, based upon moral principles, though they unfold themselves very slowly. Every man is driven to his destiny—not at once, but in the end. Sometimes God takes away His protecting hand, and the man, during his life, is shown to the world to be quite different from what he was supposed to be. We are not sufficiently thankful for our reputations such as they are. The old Puritans used to say that there was more sin in the heart of the best man that ever lived than had broken out in the life of the worst! If God left us to ourselves what should we be? Judas goes to his own place of his own accord. The force of circumstances is often the will of God. The man is left to himself, and, in an unguarded moment, the sin within him will betray him, and the world knows him as he is.

But even if this should not happen, and the man goes through life deceiving all, and even himself,



there is a day set apart, and we are hastening to it, when the good and the bad, the sheep and the goats, will be finally separated. After that final judgment no man will be in the wrong place. Hypocrisy is a sin of earth. There is no hypocrisy in the world to come, not even in hell. No soul pretends there to be other than he is. Here good and evil are intermingled and constantly mistaken. At the judgment seat of Christ we stand for what we are.

What is the Gospel? It is that Christ has come to the sinner's place, so that the sinner might be saved from drifting to his own. He changes place with you, and He has gone to prepare a "place" for you. Trust Him, and you will become such that no place will suit you except where Christ is, either in this world or the world to come. Amen.

## X.

### THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF GOD.\*

*"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."*—ROMANS viii. 28.

I THINK the mistake we generally fall into with regard to these great words of St. Paul is that we attach to them a meaning which is too narrow. That meaning, I admit, is exegetically correct, but at the same time it is hardly wide enough. We take the words to refer mainly, if not indeed exclusively, to the sorrows and disappointments of life. When we remind one another that "all things work together for good" we usually mean that all disagreeable things so work; that all the facts of human experience, though they may seem to have no good in them, if we are patient, they will, to those that love God, work out some good. After every pain there will be a subsequent blessing, to every discipline there will be some corresponding advantage, and in the end, all things, however much they may appear at the time to be against our conceptions and plans, work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to His purpose. The words are thus taken as indicating a kind of Christian Philosophy of tribulation.

\*This Sermon is, by kind permission, reproduced from the Mundesley Bible Conference Report, 1913.

I have no doubt at all but that this thought must have been predominant in the mind of the Apostle. He has already referred to the "sufferings of this present life." Nevertheless I hope I am not far wrong when I ask you to think that these words are meant to convey more than that, and I want to look at them to-night, as they truly are, as one of the greatest and most comprehensive of all the utterances of St. Paul. Here, in fact, we have what we might call the Apostle's world-view, his idea of the totality of things, his philosophy of life as a whole. For every human being has not only his own individual experience of life, but also his theory of life in its totality. And every man directs his individual life in the light of this general philosophy.

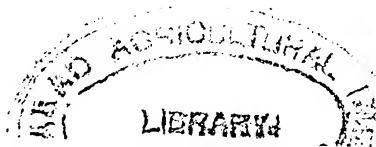
A man keeps, may be, a small shop in a country village, but he has to keep in mind two things; he has to study, on the one hand, the common requirements of his neighbours, and, at the same time, he must have some idea, rather a crude idea it may be, yet some definite idea, about the state of the general market, about how things are going throughout the big emporiums of the world. If not he will be unable to manage his own little shop to his own profit, or to the good of any one. Now I want to-night to look at these words as giving to us, who are here in this Conference, an idea about the general moral market. I dare say I have the privilege of addressing to-night some of you who, like myself, are labouring in small, out-of-the-way villages. Somebody must be in the villages. We cannot all be in London. Those who labour in part in small

country villages have, first of all, to adapt themselves to the narrow, circumscribed life of the community in which they are placed, but, at the same time, it is very good occasionally to come to a Conference like this, to be encouraged by knowing how things stand in the wider world. Sometimes we are apt to get disheartened, and rather narrow and severe in our views. I want you to go from this meeting realising that "all things work together for good," that the general trend of all things is to the glorifying of the highest; that there is a great subtle, yet clear, divine movement initiated by God and led by Him, to glorify goodness. And, in our little part, we work to help that consummation. I am not forgetting sin, but whatever you make of sin you can only regard it as an exception. Sin can never be the law as long as God is supreme ruler. Sin is the transgression of the law. Sin, as a power, I do not forget, is elsewhere called "the law of sin and death," but the very essence of sin is to be against all spiritual order. Sin is the exception, however prevalent it may be; sin is an intrusion; if I may so express it, sin is an impertinence. Sin has no business to be here. It is not an essential and necessary part of the general scheme. It lacks the wedding garment. Wherever you see it, you can rightly ask it, as was asked of that man in the marriage feast, How did you come here? The good was here before it, and must, in the very nature of things, ultimately survive it. For all things, properly understood, are arranged by God for one purpose, namely, to secure the ultimate conquest, the final realisation

of the good. Do you remember the great paragraph which precedes these words of St. Paul, that difficult yet suggestive paragraph about the "creature," and the "expectation of the creature waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God"? I am not going to try to explain to you to-night what the "creature" means. If I could do so, I should accomplish a thing that no one has ever been able to do since the Apostle's own day; but I think we shall agree to this, that, putting the Church aside, because it is contrasted with the "creature," the "creature" means all that came from the creative hand of God. You have on the one hand the Creator, and you have on the other the creature, which came from God's creative hand. There is, it appears, a groaning of nature which is in perfect sympathy with the prayers of the Church. "The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." All nature has been so created and is so governed that the best in it must ultimately triumph. We find here a glimpse of the true dignity of the Christian Church. I have no objection to your singing, now and again, about the poor shivering pilgrim band that goes "through the night of doubt and sorrow," and the famous appeal of Cowper to the "fearful saints." But, at the same time, I hope you are not always thinking of God's people as a small remnant of frightened men and women who have been terrified by the preachers and are trying to flee from the wrath to come as quietly as they may, surrounded by a world which is great, dignified, and all-powerful. Things are not

like that. Really it is not correct to say that the Church is in the world. The right way to put it is that the world is in the Church; for the idea of a Church is the all-embracing idea. The greatest of God's thoughts is a Church redeemed and sanctified in Christ her Lord. The universe is a subordinate conception, something to which God gave being in order to realise His purposes in the Church. The universe has no meaning apart from the Church of God within it. Nature, and humanity itself, find their justification in the saints, in those who, as St. Paul teaches, love God, and whose call is based upon His eternal purpose.

And nature cannot be explained or justified, its purpose cannot be understood, apart from the spiritual interpretation of the Church. As the soul is to the body, so is the Church to the world. The human body is a fine thing; but take the soul out of it, you can only bury or burn it, and the sooner the better. The world may be very glorious, but take the Church out of it, and there is nothing in it of purpose or meaning. I myself cannot see how it is possible to justify the existence of the world at all if it is not here to carry out the ideals and purposes of the Church. We live in days of statistics. I wonder if anybody could tell me how much it takes to keep one world going for one day. I am not going to trouble you with any problems as to how much it takes to keep all the worlds going through the millenniums. You need not alarm yourselves about how much it takes to keep even this little world for all the centuries, only just for one day.



I think you will agree that there is a vast amount of energy and care required to do this. Well, what for? Why? If this world is only an arena for sorrow and for sin, if this planet is only a place wherein evil principles evolve themselves, and bad men ripen for their eternal doom—I speak reverently, I hope, but if this is the case, I fail to see how any one can justify the creation or maintenance of this world at all. It is not consistent with the goodness or with the wisdom of God, to keep the world in existence, if all things in it are not, somehow, eventually developing and fulfilling the good.

The Apostle wants us to be perfectly certain about this, and our great aim in life must be to put ourselves in harmony with this great Divine movement. Pessimism is the blackest of all sins. Nothing can be more dishonouring to God. "God will forgive thee all save thy despair." Certainly truth is very often found on a scaffold, and a lie, I admit, is very often on a throne; but it cannot be for ever so. It is against the genius of the universe, as well as against the definite purposes of God. The laws and aims of nature are the will of God. Then we must work to drive every lie from all thrones, because God is within the shadow, keeping watch above His own. "All things work together for good."

I want just to recall to your minds the three great things which the Apostle says are to be seen in the world. I believe all my brethren who have ever preached on these words have practically used the same heads. And I will take the points that will at

once suggest themselves. What did St. Paul find in the world? He found ENERGY, UNITY, and PURPOSE. He found *energy* because, he says, "all things work." There is dynamic force and activity everywhere. There is, also, *unity*, and this is an important additional idea, because "all things work together." This unity is not always perceivable, yet it is always there. The one mind directs the whole. And, finally, there is *purpose*. It is not a kind of Creative Evolution, finding things out as you go along, but, in and through everything, there is a divine, fixed purpose. All things work together "for good."

I. Think, for a moment, of the first thing. The Apostle finds in the world energy, for "all things work." We have always to keep in mind that one of the chief problems of the spiritual life in this world is to pay proper regard to our limitations, and to adapt ourselves to our environment; because there are two conditions of the spiritual life here that will not be found in heaven. We serve God today in a human body, to begin with, and secondly, in a material world. The Church soon forgot this, and asceticism in its extreme forms is, I suppose, an attempt to live the spiritual life apart from God's ordained conditions. We are to glorify God in our body, and under the necessary limitations of space and time. We are in a living world, and all things in it are working, even as we are working. Some allowance must always be made for the influence of things around us upon our thinking, and upon our way of expressing our experience. I suppose you



have all a Debating Society in the churches to which you belong, and you must be bewildered sometimes for questions to debate about. I gather from the kind of subjects you choose, that you must be often nearly in despair. Might I suggest that it would be well for you to consider the influence of Climate and of Health upon Theology? I think you could make a good deal of it, and in the end, perhaps, some of your people would be driven to the conclusion that theological opinion is, after all, simply a matter of climate or of health.

In cold countries, where the mountains are high, cold, and bleak, where the lonely, interminable deserts spread themselves out, where the storms are frequent and terrible, where nature is hard and life is difficult—the conception of God you find in that kind of country is generally that of the Transcendent God of law and judgment. Theirs is the religion of strong men, men who are intellectually and morally brave. You go again to climates where nature is kind and the sun is always shining; where the flowers come out without any trouble and life is easy. The people there worship the Immanent God as a divine, forgiving Father. And, strange to say, in these relaxing climates there is often a tendency to forget the eternal differences between virtue and sin. It is wonderful what an effect different parts of the world and conditions of life have upon our opinions on theological and moral questions.

Some one, I remember, once wrote a curious article, making out the daily state of Carlyle's health from different paragraphs in one of his books.

When he felt very bad, the world was going headlong to its inevitable doom: Take your own experience. The minister had had a busy week. It was Saturday morning, and he was obliged to get a sermon together for Sunday. He did not feel well, and it was raining. What could a man preach about, or even think about, under these conditions, but the serious decline in church membership, the prevalence of materialism in the church, the levity of the young, and the general and immediate collapse of everything? Do not be alarmed at all, because he will be better in a week or two, and perhaps he will commence his sermon earlier in the week. And the sun will shine upon him, and he will give you a message of hope in a fine sermon on the "great multitude that no man could number." After all, as our day, so our work must be, for all things go to the making of it.

John Calvin, that great doctor of the Church, was, as you remember, weak in health and generally suffering. He wrote many of his books when ill in bed. I have often thought that if his health had been better, and if the people had been kinder, there would have been more sunshine perhaps in his theology, and the number of the elect would have been considerably augmented. Trivial causes may have vital effects. After all, everything is alive, and we are in a living world, and we must remember always that God is behind all things, entering our souls and touching our lives at innumerable points. The farmer works with God, or he could not farm at all. He does his part, and God completes it. After all,

it is God Who works. This word "work" has, to a certain extent, lost its original dignity. There is a certain class of men in this country to which other classes have given a name, out of no respectful feeling, yet it is the finest name in the language. They call them the "Working Classes," a glorious name! I do solemnly protest against such a name being given simply to people who do manual labour. I have just discovered that a minister of the Gospel is not a working man within the meaning of the Act. I suppose they want to honour us. But there is no dignity like work, no glory like service. Let us get back to this original idea that we have been sent to the world, like our Lord Himself, to work. If any one could have lived in this world without working it would have been the Son of the Highest, but He was wont to say: I may have to live without sleeping and without eating, yet I must work; for "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." The greatest thing in life is to follow where God works, and labour with Him. To be co-workers with God is the aim and purpose and glory of human life. The Master-Worker is God.

And how interesting this world would be to you and to me if we always realised that in these manifestations of nature God directly speaks! A friend of mine, a doctor who was barely forty years of age, lay dying among the mountains of Wales—his life-plans, of course, shattered. And during his last days on earth he felt too weak to think and too weak to write or to talk. The night before he died he asked the nurse to put him by the window so that,

in the morning, he could see the first signs of the dawn appearing over the mountain top. Paganism, you say! I do not think so. That man knew God before, he had met Him in a more intimate revelation, and now, feeble and weak, he wanted to be thus reminded, as it were, directly by God Himself, of a dawn coming after the darkness and sadness of our miserable life and a hope somewhere beyond our failures. If our hearts were sympathetic enough and our minds were clearer, we should be continually in touch with this mystic, divine working; for it is no blind law or destiny that governs things, but a loving God, in Whom all things work.

II. Again, all things, according to St. Paul, "work together." Not only is there divine energy, dynamic power in action, but there is throughout a perfect similarity and unity of purpose and of method, for "all things work together." You must have really a trained mind to see the unity of the universe. To the untrained, nature would be simply a conglomeration of facts and forces that have no relation one to the other. There must be the scientific instinct to see in it all the unity of law; to gather together a number of facts, and then, having arranged them, gradually to trace the law that underlies them; then to examine these laws and see the principles that join them together, finally to follow the principles until you arrive at will and personality in God. Thus all things, when sympathetically understood, work together.

I wonder what the savage Indian thought when he first saw a great thunder-storm. I suppose he re-

garded it as a magnificent and tremendous display of power, purposeless of course; with no aim in it whatever, as far as he could see, but that the great Spirit was displaying his power in something that was terrible to behold, and for him there was nothing better to do than to hasten to hide himself until the terror had passed. But the man of trained intellect, looking at the same storm, would conclude that all these great nature-powers work according to definite laws of their own, and if he could only discover the principle and law of their action he would feel certain that he could employ that power for his own purposes. And gradually, by observing and obeying nature, man begins to have dominion within the laws of nature, and the unity of nature helps him to understand the use and purpose of all things.

Now, it is by the latent power in the storm we to-day do everything. Electricity, having been discovered and disciplined, becomes our most useful and most indispensable ally. We do nearly everything by it. A man in my own country told me not long ago that in twenty years there will be no need of ministers of the Gospel, for all the preaching will be done by electricity. I could not deny it, and I had to console myself by expressing the hope that the listening would then have some electricity in it too! We do not know what possibilities are contained in things that to the untutored minds of primeval men have been simply terrible and purposeless. As in nature, so in Providence. All things in the world's moral government work in perfect harmony, for there is one divine Mind arranging, governing, and directing all.

The world, in the hand of God, is like a great piece of machinery.

Have you ever taken a man from the country, who never saw such things, to see some of the modern specimens of great machinery? Here you show him a wheel so large that you cannot see it all unless you recede to a certain distance from it; and on the other side, you will show him another wheel so small that you can hardly see it at all unless you look very carefully: yet both are parts of the same piece of machinery. There you show a wheel going at such a rate that it has disappeared in its own velocity. And on the other side, another moves so slowly that you can hardly perceive that it is really moving at all. One wheel is going one way and the other one in quite the opposite direction. Your friend would naturally say, "Do you call this order? Do you call this machinery? Why, this is Socialism, and the end of all things." It is true no two things seem to be doing the same thing, no two wheels are of the same size, speed, or direction. Some wheels are so very small. Yet the chief thing in life, after all, is not to be great but to be indispensable.

Only the other day I was walking along the quiet country road when I saw a magnificent motor-car, standing still, with some very dignified-looking people beside it. It was a splendid machine. I do not know how much it could have cost—however, it wouldn't move. A little nut, the most trivial thing in appearance, had been lost; but the whole magnificent thing had to stop. And the nobility had

to wait. I felt a certain subtle regard for that little lost nut, wherever it was. After all, the great thing in life is to be in the universal plan somewhere, doing what the world cannot do without. And that is ~~within~~ within the reach of all. But to get back to my illustration. These wheels of machinery have all been so arranged by the man who planned it all that each does something to help the common end. So is the world in the hand of God. And I do not think myself that any man, whatever his system of philosophy or of theology may be, can discover any theory of life that will afford him intellectual peace unless he has a supreme God somewhere in his scheme taking charge of all things.

I regard the death of Christ not as one fact of human history merely, but as a typical fact, as a kind of microcosm, as it were, of the great experiences of history, gathered together into one occurrence. Christ died, if I may so put it, at the very heart of History; for all the principles that have governed human events were in action there. Pilate was there, so was Herod; the Roman was there and the Jew; Simon Peter was there and Judas Iscariot. They and many more were there, not simply as individuals but as types. You remember the words of St. Peter at Jerusalem afterwards. "For of a truth against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were gathered together." What were they gathered together for? They were gathered together "to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be

done." They carried out their own plans; yet above all was the divine overmastering purpose. "There is a divinity that shapes our ends." There is a divine mind summing up the little atoms of our lives and forming the perfect whole. I am not going to try to show you how that is consistent with our conception of human liberty. Why, if I preached to you a gospel I could explain, it would not be big enough to save any soul. We are not here to explain, we are here to preach a message wider and greater than our thoughts; and we proclaim it not because we understand it, but because we believe it, because we know it to be true. All these things should wonderfully fortify us in our faith. After all, the human mind is only a harbour on the boundless ocean of divine truth. On the ocean there is ample space for the ships to pass without coming into contact, but the largest harbour is not big enough to take more than one in at a time. The human mind, after all, is too limited to let the concepts of divine Sovereignty and human Liberty enter into it fully at the same time. We must eliminate one from our minds before we can get an adequate view of the other. Our minds, at their best, are not large enough to see the unity, but they are one in the mind of God, and, through faith, we are able to see things as God sees them, for through faith we are able to take the divine view of things, and in that view we see the one God, and the one law, one element, and the one far-off divine event. Ultimate Unity dwells in God alone; and where reason falters, faith is at peace.

I notice that our President in the opening sentences of the Programme for this Conference calls



our attention to the growing uncertainty now to be felt and experienced everywhere, and so summons the people of God together to a consideration of abiding things. I call upon you now to consider this final reality. Our feeble attempts may appear futile and even contradictory, but God is above and behind all; and we become perfect in Christ, and our individual purposes are realised, because they are one with His. And however obscure the part of the vineyard you are labouring in, remember the great Lord of the harvest is behind your attempt, and the issue is safe in His keeping.

III. Then, lastly, comes the third point. I mentioned that all things are working together towards a definite purpose. That purpose is "good," which means the glory of God in the perfect well-being of all His creatures through Christ our Lord. And I say these purposes are going to be brought about, whether we aid their progress or not. The will of God is to be done on earth, whatever we are going to do. But here lies the deep mystery of prayer, and the great purpose of the Father to bring our feeble, inefficient souls into perfect harmony with a great, fixed, divine purpose. After all, prayer is not asking from God this thing or that thing. We degrade prayer when we look at it in that way. Prayer is life on the lines of the great utterance of the Master, when He said, "Not My will, but Thine be done." Through the Church all things work for good, and we are commanded to put ourselves by the aid of the Spirit in touch with this great divine movement. And your life will be lost if you do not

do it. The only way in which we can save our lives is that they should be brought into line with the eternal purpose of God. As we heard this morning, life is a great thing, and to be treasured. It is a noble, great thing to be alive, because we live in the world where God is realising His highest purpose.

And not only are we alive, but we are alive in, not perhaps the best, but the most interesting of all possible worlds, and at what we must also regard as the most important and significant period in the history of that world. It is truly a great and noble thing to be alive. Do not think continually of the rest of heaven. It is an untrue and unnatural state of mind. Let no healthy man say that he is tired of life and is longing for the peace and rest of heaven. Heaven will come, but now we are in a world full of infinite possibility and endless charm.

In this world we have God's battle to fight, and He Himself is Leader. By the Self-limitation of His coming in the flesh, God identified Himself with our race, and became in truth the Son of man. By this surrender of heart and life to God, we identify ourselves with Him, and become one with God through the Spirit of His Son. I have spoken about the ways of God in the wide world outside us. The Apostle puts alongside of that the simple way of our identification with God's holy plan. It originates in a *Call*. We are "the called according to His purpose." The order of the world and this individual Call spring from the same original Divine Purpose. Those who have responded to the call, "Love

God," are in very truth one with Him in heart and life. The result of this is that they "work" with God, and all things, through God, work together for their good. This, I admit, is not the inherent tendency of things. Men of science teach us that most things in this world, if left to themselves, would soon deteriorate, wither, and decay. But I am not preaching the scientific view of the world merely, but the evangelical view. God has entered historically into the life of this world in our Incarnate Lord, and Providence is the handmaid of the Cross. The world is ruled by the Christ who died for it, and is ruled in the spirit, and to further the purposes, of that Death. This is the gospel which lies at the heart of my message. In Christ we find the ultimate meaning and aim of all the varied transactions of Time.

Do we in our deepest hearts really *know* this? St. Paul declares it to be a thing we ought to know. He knew it. "*We know* that all things work together for good." Trust to it, even if you fail to see it to-night. When the Conference is over, and the reaction comes during your first Sundays at home, you will probably doubt whether all this be true. Faint, not, then, but rest your weary souls in God. I live, as many of you know, on the Menai Straits. The glorious old mountains are in front, and Snowdon is just before my window. I often hear the people in the village asking each other in the morning: Which way is the wind to-day? It was in the south last night." The fact that it was in the south last night does not of necessity imply that it is

still in the south. The elements are so liable to change. But I never heard anybody asking: Where is Snowdon this morning? Remember, we do not see Snowdon every day. The mists cover it by day, and the darkness covers it at night, and the storms and the tempests hide it. Sometimes we do not see the grand old mountain for a week; but we are in no wise concerned. We simply wait, and, in a day or two after, the mists will dissolve, and the darkness will vanish, the tempests will be stilled, and the day will dawn, and God's eternal mountain, in all its majesty, will still be there.

Are we not asking too much, these days, about the direction of the wind, and thinking too little about the eternal stability of the mountains? We must lift up our thoughts from statistics to the promises, and remember that, though all our feeble aims are nothing if God is not behind all, yet with Him we do more than conquer. Let us remember the vision. Even if we fail, we can look through our failures across the ages, like that old patriarch of old, and say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand up at the last upon the earth." "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Time is short, and we must work. The night cometh for us all, when no man can work. Work, for God works. Work out your own salvation, for He worketh in you, and no work done for Him can fail. He promises to be our shield in the doing of His will; and when work on earth is done, He will be for ever our exceeding great reward.

## XI.

### THE APOSTOLIC BENEDICTION.\*

*"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all."*—2 Cor. xiii. 14.

THESE are very familiar words of Scripture. They are widely known and they are continually used. I suppose there are no portions of the New Testament more in use than the Lord's Prayer and the Apostolic Benediction. Yet in spite of that, and perhaps on account of that, these great words are in danger of being neglected. There is nothing in greater danger of being neglected than the thing that is in constant use. I remember reading somewhere that the old priests on the Continent have forgotten all their prayers. They have repeated them so often that they have disappeared from their minds. It is a paradox, but still it is quite possible for a man to repeat a thing continually until he has lost all sense of its meaning and import. I believe the Apostolic Benediction stands in that danger. We are inclined to regard these words as a kind of authoritative apostolic formula to bring a religious meeting to a close. As we end a secular meeting by singing the National Anthem, not

\* \* Reproduced, by permission, from the Christian World Pulpit, Aug. 21, 1912.

because at the moment we are burning with a desire that God may save the King, but because it is a fitting close to an ordinary meeting of loyal people, so we may regard these words as being most suitable for ending a religious gathering; we "pronounce the Benediction." Now the Benediction is very seldom preached upon. I never in my life heard a sermon upon it. Some never think of the words as words to preach about, but if you think for a moment I am sure you will agree with me that they are among the very best utterances of the New Testament. If a command came from heaven that every man should select one verse, and all the others were to be taken away—I am not referring now to verses of personal experience, but verses which place before us in the completest fashion redemption in Christ Jesus—how many verses in the Bible would give us a complete idea of that redemption? For my own part, I believe my own selection would lie between two verses, the well known John iii. 16: "For God so loved the world . . . ." and the Apostolic Benediction. I am sure if we had no other verses we could make out the complete salvation which is in Christ Jesus from these comprehensive words: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost."

Now the first thing that strikes you in these great words is, how rich and how complete is that communion with God into which Christianity brings mankind. It is the province of religion not merely

to demonstrate the existence of God, but to reveal God to mankind by putting man into communion with Him. There are other ways of communion with God besides the Christian revelation. There is Judaism, the religion of the Old Testament; there is Naturalism, the study of Nature and art, and the revelation God gives of Himself in the work of His hands. But if you compare Judaism with the redemption in the Gospel, what do you find? In the Old Testament you find that knowledge of God and communion with Him was only to be got in one small country, and, strictly speaking, it was not to be found in the whole of that country. It was only to be found in one city, namely, Jerusalem; it was only to be found in that city in one building, namely, the Temple; it was not to be found in the whole of the Temple, only in one small room, the Holy of Holies; there was only one man inside that room, and he was only there once a year. Now think of that—one country, one people, one city, one building, one room, one man, once a year. Then come to the New Testament revelation, not confined to any land, or any people, or any city, or any place, or any man. You find an open way of communion between every man and his Creator. We speak of our civil liberty, and our religious liberty; after all, my dear friends, there is only one great truth that protects our liberties, and it is this common right of access to God individually, without priest, without temple, the right of every individual soul to have direct access to the Creator through Jesus Christ. Thus we find how broad and compre-

hensive the revelation of God in Christianity is. Then, if you think of what I may call naturalism, it is true, of course, that Nature brings a certain refinement to the soul; but for one thing, it has no moral effect. The study of Nature will not produce morality. A man may be a genius, he may be a man of taste, he may be a high authority on the sciences, he may be a great master in art, and yet his moral character may receive no direct influence from these accomplishments. Of course, when you have found God in Christ, Nature will enrich your spiritual experience, but in and by herself she will never give a complete idea of God, nor change and redeem the character. You must come to the New Testament for that. God is not to be known, after all, in the fields and by the riverside. God is to be known in His word, in His temple, and in the spiritual experiences of the soul.

And when we come to the New Testament we find something broader than Judaism, something more definite than naturalism. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost." What do we find? First of all, we have God in all the totality of His being, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. What else have you? All the blessings of the Christian redemption, because you have grace, love, and communion. There is no blessing contained in the redemption through Christ Jesus our Lord which you cannot get within the compass of these comprehensive words.



So I say—and I am aiming at nothing more than to try and make you see how great a thing is contained in the simple words with which we close our worship—we find here communion with divine persons, and participation of divine gifts. Note the order in which the persons are taken in the Apostolic Benediction. We begin with our Lord Jesus Christ. I believe the reason is the obvious reason—that Paul is taking them here in the order of experience. The first thing that entered his spirit and took possession of him was the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. That was the way his salvation began, and through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ he beheld the love of God, and he was brought into communion with the Holy Ghost. So he places them down here, not in the correct theological order, but in the order of personal experience. I do not know that there is a doctrine of the Trinity in any other religion. I believe there is not. I believe the doctrine of the Trinity is the Christian contribution to the doctrine of God. I do not think for a moment there is in any other religion in the world the idea of the Godhead existing as three divine persons. It was really a truth that grew in the experience of the Church. If you ask me whether the saints in apostolic times knew anything about the doctrine of the Trinity, I would say they did not. It grew in the mind of the Church. What is the purpose of it? What do we gain by thinking of God as three persons? Well, to begin with, it enriches our conception of God. I do not think we could conceive of God as a moral being without the doctrine of the Trinity, for the essence

of morality is love, and there can be no love without communion. If we thought of God as an abstract being, perfect in Himself, I do not think we could conceive of Him as a moral being; but when you conceive of the Godhead as possessing these inherent distinctions, the Father loving the Son, and the Son loving the Father, then you find within the Godhead the basis of all morality; and I think our idea of God would be considerably impoverished if we had not this great, mysterious conception of communion within the Godhead between divine persons. Also, this great doctrine is an explanation of the Bible. In the Old Testament, you will recollect, God was one God, the God of Israel. In the Incarnation another person appears in the world. He says He has been sent by the God of the Old Testament, and still claims equality with Him. He claims that He is a divine being, with equal power and authority with the God whom Israel worshipped. On the day of Pentecost another mysterious power took possession of the minds and hearts of men, and the Church realised that this was the divine person promised by the Son. Now the Church had three divine persons on her hands. So the doctrine of the Trinity grew in the consciousness of the Church as the only explanation of the revelation God had given of Himself. In reading the Word of God you cannot understand it unless you have the doctrine of the Trinity. Again, there is the experience of Christian people, which will always imply a Trinity. You were at a prayer meeting the other night and a man prayed who was no theologian, but who was a sound

Christian. Before he had finished his first sentence you had the doctrine of the Trinity, because he said : " We come to Thee, O Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, and through the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit." No act of communion with God is possible unless you are praying to a person, and trusting to a person, and led by a person. So if you analyse your own spiritual experience you will find there is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So after all, my friends, the Gospel we preach is a great Gospel. Ah, we meet in London on Sunday morning to talk about the doctrine of the Trinity, and some people may say that is out of date. But the truth is never out of date. Heresy is continually out of date. It is hardly worth your while beginning with a heresy, because you will have to find another before you have quite mastered the one you have got. The truth remains, and, after all, this is the way Christians are produced—by communion with these great, divine, inexplicable truths. You cannot produce religion by small, minor truths. Social conditions in this country and in America at the present time are such that a man who has been poor all his life finds himself, perhaps, suddenly the possessor of great wealth, and the poor man (because I am sure he is more to be pitied than envied) has to put on the manners of a gentleman. He goes to a bookseller and purchases a book which tells him how to move in those unfamiliar surroundings. He learns the rules off by heart, but one day he finds himself in a position in which he cannot for the life of him remember what the book says. Oh, no, you cannot turn out

a gentleman in that way. A gentleman is produced by generations of high and honourable thinking, and you can leave that man to his instincts. The true gentleman needs no book. Now, in the same way exactly, there is a type of Christian produced by rules, little directions. There is a danger nowadays lest preaching should become nothing more than that. A preacher goes into his pulpit on Sunday and gives to his people a few "don'ts" which they are to observe during the coming week. You cannot produce the high character which the New Testament speaks about like that. How is it produced? By constant communion with high themes and divine persons. You can trust the instincts of a man who knows what is meant by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

And what, again, do we find? Participation of divine gifts. Think of the love of God. How great a privilege it is to preach that! Life is very sad to many of you. Your neighbours know many of your difficulties; God alone knows most of them. What is preaching good for, unless it brings hope and consolation to a man by helping him to realise the love of God? After all, redemption starts here. We have a poor, superficial theology sometimes which makes Christ the Redeemer and God the Judge. That is not the theology of the New Testament. All the salvation of the world sprang from the love of God. I remember reading somewhere that when David Livingstone was in this country, being honoured for

the great and wonderful things he had done, he said, "Yes, by the grace of God I have been able to do some marvellous things, but the idea was not my own. When I was a little child it was my chief delight to read about the brave warriors who carried the Word of God to distant parts of the world. They started, and I have tried to follow." Ah, when the Son of God started from heaven for Calvary, He was walking along a path neither God nor man had ever put foot upon before. Why did He come? How did the idea originate? Our Lord Himself says: "I saw it in the love of the Father." Redemption began in the love of God, and that love is wider and broader than anything we can imagine.

"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you." This, I think, is something for the guilty. I believe the angels know something about the love of God, but I do not think the angels quite understand the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. People say there is no hell, but any number of people will tell you, "I believe in a hell, because I am in it." Any man who knows what it is to have a conscience knows what it is to need the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is God's healing balm to the guilty. If some young man is listening to me with the weight of yesterday's sin upon his soul, I would say, Do not go to a priest, do not go to a minister, but go to the Lord Jesus Christ; His grace will heal you."

My friends, if you are trying to do good, and find little sympathy, fall back on the love of God. If you feel your sin is stronger than you are, and con-

science troubles you, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be your experience. If you are lonely—~~and~~ there is no place in which you can be lonely as you can be in London—rely upon the communion of the Holy Spirit. I cannot wish you wealth, or power, or pleasure, because I know of nothing that is going to make these things certain for you. But when I wish you these great things they are not idle words, for God Himself will give them: “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all!” Amen.

## XII.

### THE PERILS AND BLESSINGS OF QUIET TIMES.\*

*"So the Church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being edified; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, was multiplied."*—ACTS ix. 31.

THESE words refer to that brief interval of peace between the conversion of St. Paul and the commencement of his apostolic work. St. Paul was a born master of men, and in any movement that he might be associated with he was certain to be the very leader. He had been in the early chapters of this book the great leader of the Jews against the Church, as he became afterwards the great leader of the Church against the Jews. His conversion had been so unexpected, so sudden, so complete, that the persecution which he had led was for the time, of course, paralysed for want of leadership and initiative and inspiration, and the Church profited by that, and throughout Judea and Galilee and Samaria, for a brief period the Church "had peace, being edified; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, was multiplied."

\* Reproduced, by permission, from the Christian World Pulpit, March 26, 1913.

This Book of Acts is, perhaps, more of a defence than a history. It is a defence of the attitude taken by the Christian Church to Judaism. It was, indeed, very hard for an outsider to understand the battle between Judaism and Christianity, especially for that type of man that has very little sympathy with fine theological and ecclesiastical distinctions. Here you have two religions—regarded as two—Judaism and Christianity. They recognised the same God, they were equally devoted, they taught the same things practically, and still they were in mortal combat for supremacy in the hearts of the people. It was very natural that an outsider should call for a plague on both their houses; it was so very hard to understand what was really the question at issue. As you well know, the fiercest battles of history are not the battles between bad and good. The fiercest battles are the battles between different degrees and different grades of good. Here you have that great principle in history evolving itself—the principle of growth, according to which the elementary gives way to the more highly developed, the partial is being transcended by the perfect. For Christianity, of course, made her appeal on that ground. Christianity was not to be one of the many religions in the world, but the only religion. There would have been no trouble at all in Rome if Christianity had been prepared to take her place among the many religions that were there already. It was the tremendous claim Christianity made to be the only faith that brought her into conflict with all that was



alive in heathen faith, and, of course, Judaism was regarded as being true—true in part, as being introductory and elementary, Christianity being the perfect, final, universal religion.

Well now, we find in this Book of Acts, therefore, a fight going on between the partial, as represented in Judaism, and the perfect and final, as represented in Christianity. And here in the text you have a little lull in the storm, a short period of quietness in the battle, when the Church "had peace, being edified; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, was multiplied."

Now, from these words I want to speak to you this morning about this—the *special advantages of quiet times*. This is a verse about a quiet time. The time before had been stirring and exciting, and the bitter fight was full of interest that there is nothing of here. This is a quiet time in between, a time that perhaps very enthusiastic people would consider as being wasted, would only regard as a time to prepare for something more stirring. 'But I want this morning to direct your attention to the special advantages that belong to quiet times, and I think that the message is suitable, at any rate in so far as we must regard the time that we are in now as being, in this sense, a quiet time.

I do not want to leave it in your minds that I regard quiet times as being the only good times. It would not do for all times to be quiet times, and therefore we will take our subject this morning in

two parts. In the first place I should like to consider with you *the periods that are different from this period of quietness*. Specially I should like to compare these quiet periods with different periods that are absolutely indispensable to the Church, and then, of course, in the second place I want to call your attention *to the special advantages, as compared with all other periods, of those periods of quietness*. You go down to the City, and you see a man standing in the door of his shop or in the door of his office, and he looks very dejected, and he says: "There is nothing going to-day; there is nothing doing." Well I want to show you this morning, if I can, that there is always something doing in the Christian Church, whether there is any noise about it or not. that quiet times have their special uses, and that we could not do without them.

But, first of all, consider other periods described in this chapter, and especially described in this book; periods that are by no means quiet. These periods must come, the Church must go through them. It will not do for us to be always quiet. Let us consider, say, three periods of excitement in the history of the Church—periods of persecution, periods of theological debate, and periods of great religious revival—of persecution, of heresy, of revival.

Those were not quiet times. You find instances of them in the Acts. You always find instances of them in the history of the Church, and the Church must pass through them. For the work of God is not always uniform. You want to build a house.

The first thing is to have rough men there to do the rough work, strong men that can remove rocks and make the place ready. Then, when the house is safely built you bring the decorator, at the end, just to give the finishing touches. There are different kinds of work—it cannot all be done by elegant men. You must have men in the world that are not exactly elegant. We want strong men to do strong work; God calls them, and they are required.

And now for a moment think of the periods of persecution. We know very little about those periods except by history; still, after all, they are very necessary to the Church. Is it not Ruskin who says that after all the greatest perils of life are the perils of prosperity? Not the perils of adversity, but the perils of prosperity. And you find that really exemplified in Holy Scripture. For if you think for a moment of God's chosen nation, that chosen nation managed very well in Egypt. They had a hard time there, but the lamp was kept burning. And they did very well in Babylon. They learned something in Babylon that they never learned before. Idolatry never troubled them after they had been to Babylon. Not only did they prosper there, but they learned things there they had never known before. It was not Egypt, it was not Babylon, that became a danger to the chosen people, but the land flowing with milk and honey. It was the prosperity of Canaan that brought about their greatest period of destruction.

There are no perils like the perils of an easy time, the perils of prosperity. There is a danger

that the Church is catering to this natural love of ease. We are not appealing to the heroic in people. We make our churches so comfortable. We make our pews so comfortable! I don't know whether the decline of spiritual tone in this country did not begin just at the time when we put the slant at the back of our pews. It was very little, but it marked a change from the straight-backed pews that our fathers worshipped in—and they were stiff-backed men. We could not sit in those pews to-day. It is now a question how to make a place of worship as comfortable as possible. Services must be brief, bright, and brotherly; the sermons must be short, the collections must be few, and we are catering for the people by making things easy. Well, I don't think anything great will come out of that. I don't believe in war; certainly I don't believe in war, but I wish sometimes that the blessing which comes through war could come some other way. It gives spirit and grip to a nation. Sport will never do it. The nation given to pleasure will never attain greatness. Really, my dear friends, we never thoroughly believe anything until we have suffered for it; and that is one great disadvantage that we have in our own day, that apart from the personal, subtle suffering that comes to many a man, the Church is not called to go together through periods of great tribulation. It purifies a Church. The hypocrites go away. Your convictions are deepened. Ah, we could not do without the periodical appearances of the stirring times of persecution.

Then again, take periods of theological discussion, periods when heresies appear, and when people have to fight for an opinion—for a theological opinion. I think it is a good thing for a man sometimes to fight for an idea, for a thing that is not going to bring him in a penny, for something that he regards as true. And you know that there is a spirit that goes round the nations and quickens them up now and then, a spirit, it may be, going in a certain direction. You see, it has been to Egypt and Babylon, to Greece and Rome. It is here now, it is going Japan's way, that peculiar spirit in history which seems to waken up a nation for a time and then depart. We are in it at the present moment. And it is a great advantage to be, as I say, in times of theological discussion when the minds of the people are stirred for the truth. You read of the sufferings of the people in this country centuries ago, and you find how people were prepared to sacrifice their lives for a theological dogma. You may say, of course, the price was too much for the benefit they got, but through those periods of discussion the truth was defined, the creeds were formed, and men realised afresh that the truth was established for ever. I think it would be a great advantage to the Church at all times to have her mind stirred about great issues.

Then, again, there are the periods of great religious revival. Those are not quiet times. It is a strange power that comes from the Spirit of God to the Church at certain definite periods. We could not do without them, for progress in the Church is

like the coming of the tide. When people from the country go to the seashore they are not quite certain for some time whether the tide is coming in or going out, because it appears to be doing both. It comes in and recedes. And so the Church has been going on in that way. The prophets died and after that everything dwindled to nothingness, and in the middle of the nothingness the Incarnation took place. After that came the darkness of the Middle Ages, and when you might have thought that everything was dead, Luther appeared. And after that came the icy gloom of the eighteenth century and the period about it, and into the midst of it came the great reformers that God sent to England and to Wales. So there are, like that, periods of stirring new influences coming to the Church according to the purposes of God, and we could not do without them. But we are inclined sometimes, like Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration, to say, "Let us build three tabernacles," and all the time we are forgetting the plain duties below. But I hope I have sufficiently spoken of that aspect of the truth to leave it to your meditations—that the Church needs stirring times, times of suffering, times of standing up for the faith, times of deep religious upheaval—the Church needs them.

But—and this brings me especially to the point I want to emphasize now—there is a corresponding advantage in times that are not like that, in quiet times. And this great verse mentions at least three great advantages that belong to quiet times. And

the first is this: these quiet times, when there is no persecution, when there is no heresy hunt, when there is no revival, when there is nothing—these periods are periods of simple, reverent piety. These men, in this period, according to the verse, were “walking in the fear of the Lord” in this quiet time—not “the fear of God.” I take “the Lord” here to mean our Lord Jesus Christ, and there is a great difference between the fear of God and the fear of Christ. A man without any spiritual influence may fear God, at any rate for a time. If a big earthquake woke London this afternoon the fear of God would be in every heart, but it is wonderful how soon people get over the fear of God. When people realise that they are face to face with death they have something which must be called the fear of God; when the trouble is over the fear disappears very soon.

This is rather the devotional fear of Jesus Christ, the people loving the Master so well that they were continually in fear lest they should do something against His will—that is the beautiful fear of the text. The fear of Christ is the fear that perfect love does not cast out, but rather the fear which perfect love develops. A man loves the Lord so thoroughly that there is in his heart a fear lest the Lord should be offended with anything he might do. Well now, that plant is of silent, gradual growth. You do not get that in stirring times; that is developed in quiet times. And really everything great, if you think of it, is developed in

quiet times. We want to learn how to take our time; how to build up solidly. We want to make wealth; we want to make money; but we want to make it quickly. I find from the papers that it now takes three weeks in America for a man to become a millionaire—it can be done, however; and I would advise the man to take the other week to complete the month to come back to where he was in the beginning—that too can easily be done. And that is what kills, this struggle to do things. It is this anxiety to do in a day what might reasonably be done in not less than half a life-time that kills. And what an advantage it is, after all, when you think about it, that we sometimes have quiet times.

The same with education. The old scholars are disappearing, and a new type is coming in, thoroughly equipped in a few years. Dr. Johnson was not a very great friend of Scotland, and he said once of education in Scotland that it was like bread in a besieged city—every man had a little and no man had quite enough. There is a lot of that in this country now, slipshod education. They graduate so quickly that the papers can hardly print their names; there is not one scholar among them very often. You cannot produce a scholar in a day. Scholarship is like spirituality, a thing that grows with time. "Walking in the fear of the Lord Jesus" in a quiet time. Therefore, when there is not much going on, when the times are not very stirring times, remember that characters are developed then in deep, reverent piety. "Walking in the fear of the Lord Jesus."



Then again, these periods of quietness are not only periods of reverent piety, they are also periods of deep and convincing experience. For these men not only walked in the fear of the Lord Jesus, they also walked in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. Even in times when to all appearances there was nothing stirring these men were living in the great realities. Mark the word—they were walking, walking in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. They were taking their time about it. You run, according to the Bible, occasionally. You “run the race that is set before you,” anyway. But here you walk, “in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.” That does not mean that you are going anywhere in particular, only that you are taking a walk in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. You don’t go out of bounds; you walk quietly, meditatively in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, in that quiet time. The Spirit which came down at Pentecost is here still and His great consolations come only to those who walk quietly in His comfort.

You want to see a country. George Borrow’s way to see a country was to go on a walking tour through it. He took his time; he walked from village to village; he talked with every man he saw. It took him a little time, but he got a wonderful idea of the country by the time he had finished. We now go in a motor, and we want to do Wales at any rate in two days, so as to be able to say we have done it when we go back. We see more and we see less. Really you won’t see anything at all un-

less you take your time. And the Church must have periods when there is nothing much going on so that the people can take a quiet look, just have quiet communion without much noise. That story is classical, is it not, about Carlyle and Tennyson spending an evening together hardly saying a word. They sat, the two great men, in the same room, one on each side of the fire, for the evening, and hardly a word was said between them, and they felt that they never enjoyed themselves more. After all, talking is an elementary way of communion. Great souls can commune in silence, and it is the superficiality of our religious experience that causes us to talk so much. We must cultivate the mystic spirit, if you call it so, that will enable us in silence to enter into the joy of the Holy Spirit. Those are quiet times. I am taking the liberty of asking how much of this quiet time there is in your religious experience. You are in many meetings, I know; I see them on the card. There is something going every night. How much time do you spend alone in perfect silence before the Lord? If you read the Psalms you will find that that is the great thing to do. You do not sing, you do not pray, you do not preach—you are simply silent before the Lord. And there are special advantages belonging to that time when man is subdued by the presence of God in the quiet hour.

Then the third advantage of a quiet time. The first was a period of reverent piety: They walked in the fear of the Lord. It was also a period of deep and convincing experience, for they walked in

the comfort of the Holy Ghost. It was also a period of wide and subtle growth. And this is very remarkable, because most men would say of these quiet periods that the Church dwindles under these conditions. Not at all. According to this verse, in this quiet time they were edified and they were multiplied. They were edified; that means the development of their characters within. They were multiplied; that means the enlargement of their sphere without. They had every kind of growth that was worth having; they had it though there was no sunshine outside; they had it in this quiet time. They were multiplied and they were edified.

There were in the Middle Ages periods when the spiritual life was very low, but there was always something going on, and architecture and art, and all that were very much alive, and the old abbeys and the old cathedrals were born; a time perhaps when souls were not saved, at least in great numbers; but still there was something going on then. There is always something going on, and if it is not going on where you live do not be alarmed—something is going on all the same. There is never a quiet time but what the Divine activity is bringing some result?

You remember how our Lord taught this in that parable of the seed growing secretly. The farmer to-day is very busy preparing the ground and putting in the seed. That is the stirring time of activity. In a few months you will see him busy again when the time of harvest is come. But in the intervening

time there is nothing going, he hardly goes to the field at all. Is that intervening time to no purpose? Ah, my dear friends, you well know there would have been no purpose in preparing the ground unless the man was looking forward to a quiet period when the seed would be growing secretly in a way he would not understand, and when he would be going after his usual avocation, God working silently to prepare for the harvest.

God is always working. In the quiet times things are ripening. I think one of the great examples of this, one of the most striking ones in the Old Testament, is the account we have of the building of Solomon's Temple. Now the building of Solomon's Temple was an event of great interest at that time. It was to be one of the most marvellous buildings the world had ever seen. And you remember it was built in perfect silence. I think it is one of the most impressive things in history. Solomon's Temple was built of stone made ready at the quarry, and there was no hammer nor axe nor tool of iron heard when it was in building. Oh, that is a great lesson. We sometimes think there is nothing going on unless there is great noise. Solomon's Temple grew up silently, without any noise whatever, until it developed in the end to be one of the finest buildings for the worship of God the world had ever seen. And there was no noise of axe, hammer, or tool of iron. It grew in perfect silence, a very temple of God. And in quiet times when there is very little noise something is being

gradually evolved by the Divine mind that carries on always its own great purposes.

One of the most daring things I think that you find even in the Psalms is that in the 23rd: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." It is very easy to say that, but really to mean it is a great thing. Is there anyone here this morning who can say that "even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil"? It is a great thing to say. How did the Psalmist learn it? How did he grow into it? He grew into it in this fashion: "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters." And in the green pastures and beside the still waters the man became strong enough to walk through the valley of the shadow of death without fearing any evil. Thus in quiet times strong characters are being built up, and in quiet times the purposes of God are being established.

And now in conclusion pray always, that these quiet periods be not too long. For the Church deteriorates if these quiet periods are too long. They are absolutely necessary for our strong development, but still they must not be too long. We should always be praying, "Revive Thy work, O Lord." For though these great blessings belong to quiet hours we must be as it were occasionally stirred up by the Divine Spirit.

And finally, do not miss the opportunities of the quiet hour because you are expecting something

more. Remember the lesson taught by Jesus with the woman at the well. It was a quiet afternoon, and there was a tired traveller sitting by the roadside on the well, and the woman came—a very remarkable woman—and she said: “I know when the Messiah comes He will explain to us all things. We are expecting the Messiah; He will come from the clouds. He will announce Himself before the world and all His enemies shall be under His feet immediately, and we are waiting for the great event.” The woman was waiting, but the tired, simple, dusty Traveller sitting at the well told her: “Woman, you have had a great privilege and you do not know it, because I that speak unto thee am He. I, the poor, simple, quiet Traveller am the great Messiah that the nation is looking forward to.”

Always keep your ears open, my dear friends, for the silent, quiet opportunities, for that way God comes. Stirring times are useful, but keep your ears open, keep your ears always open for the still small voice. In the turmoil of your life, whatever it is, listen to God's silent, solemn appeal in quiet times. If not He will wake you with His thunder, and the opportunity of life will be over.

### XIII.

#### THE PROMISE OF THE MORNING STAR.\*

*"And I will give him the morning star."*—REV.  
ii. 28.

THIS is one of the promises which our Lord gives to him who overcometh. They are promises given by the Glorified Christ, given from the high seat of power. When our Lord was on earth He promised great and marvellous things to those who followed Him. It was strange that He who appeared to possess so little promised so much, but they have all come to pass. How much more these promises given by Him who sits at God's right hand! So whatever "the morning star" means, it means something that is going to be given; let there be no doubt about that. It is something that is going to be done, whatever it is.

"I will give them the morning star." What does it mean? These words are very familiar; they are very simple, and yet they are very difficult to understand. Evidently we are not to take these words in their literal sense. The morning star, whatever it is, is a symbol. It is a visible thing to help you to realise an invisible reality. Symbolism of necessity

\* Reproduced from the Christian Age, May 2, 1913.

fills a large part in all religious experience. You cannot have a religion without any ritual at all, and how much ritual you ought to have depends altogether, so far as I can understand, on the man's own temperament. But we must have signs and symbols, and not only is this a necessity in religious things, but all thinking is based upon the correct and sympathetic interpretation of symbols. Whether you look at art in all its aspects, whether you think of music, or painting, or what-not, they are all symbolic. You look at a symbol, and the symbol may mean everything or it may mean nothing, according to the intelligence and sympathy of the mind. I suppose there can be nothing more absurd than a piece of music in old notation to the man who knows nothing whatever about such things. It looks sufficiently ridiculous in any notation, but in the old notation it looks as if some madman had been going over the page in his sleep! But if a man who knew anything about it said there was nothing in it, you would not believe him. These peculiar things suggest something to the sympathetic and understanding mind, and when you give them to a man who knows, he tells you: "Why, that is the 'Hallelujah Chorus!'" So here in this chapter you have hidden manna spoken of, new names, white stones, morning stars. All these things are to be given to somebody. And I say, to the unsympathetic mind this is all mysticism, probably nonsense. But if we only look at these things in the right way we find these mysterious names signify something, that is very real, and very great.



There is something distinctly Eastern in my text, something foreign. It is not the way in which an Englishman would put it—though it might be the way in which a Welshman would put it. “I will give him the morning star.” When you think how the thoughts of this great book have travelled, of the different types of mind they passed through, you are not surprised that in outward expression they are so difficult to understand. We call this the Revelation of St. John, but that is not the name the book gives to itself. Rather, it is called the Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave. That was the first movement in the history of the contents of this great book. They came from the mind of God the Father to the mind of God the Son, and, of course, they came in their totality along that line, for the infinite power of the Father to reveal was equalled by the infinite power of the Son to receive. And Christ having received this revelation from God the Father, passes it on to the angel. The angel may be superior to us in intelligence, but still we will agree that when God speaks to an angel there is, so to speak, a narrowing down of the truth. The angel had to pass it on to John. John was about the most spiritually-minded man then living, but I don’t know how he got on when he was talking with the angel. There must have been some modification again when the thoughts of this book came from the angelic to the human mind, as there was when they came from God’s mind to that of the angel. And then when the great thoughts contained here had lodged

themselves in John's mind, John had to transcribe them into cold print, and there is no man who does not know how difficult it is to put into cold words what you have felt in moments of high inspiration. Really, our greatest moods cannot be put into words at all. Think of poor John when he had seen and heard these marvellous and unutterable things. He had to do it by the guidance and help of the Spirit, of course, but the words of man were so feeble, and the thoughts of God were so vast that they have come to us in the most likely things to represent them—hidden manna, new names, morning stars.

Now there are at least two other passages in the New Testament which speak of the morning star, and in their light it may be possible for us to get some idea of what the morning star really is. In the closing chapter of the book, you remember, Jesus Christ Himself is the morning star. Then St. Peter speaks of the day star—the same star—rising in our hearts. I wonder whether you have been walking in the country at eventide and have passed a simple well, and have looked into it. You have seen a star in it. You looked straight up to heaven and saw a star there too. Both were the same star. If there had been no star in heaven there would be no star in the well, and if there had not been a well the star in heaven would not have been reflected at all. Now Christ is objectively the morning star, but the heart of a man, made pure through love to Christ, reflects, as it were, that star in his own experience, so that the objective Christ becomes a new and bright real-

ity. And that consciousness of Christ in the heart is, I suppose, the morning star.

But why the morning star? In order to see the point of that I think we must recall to our minds the conditions under which this special promise was given by our Lord. It was at a very difficult time. It was at the beginning of a reaction. The new enthusiasm seemed to be gradually dying out. The apostles had been enthusiastically expecting the day of the Lord, and instead, the shades of night were falling. They were faced by heresies within and persecutions without, and it was not what they had expected. Have you ever thought what must have been Adam's thought when he saw the sun go down for the first time? Whether you take Genesis as history or not it will do us no harm to reflect upon these vivid pictures. You remember Adam had no theory of the uniformity of nature, and all that. We enjoy the sunset because we have no doubt whatever that in a few hours the sun will appear again with equal splendour. I wonder whether Adam knew that! What would he think when he saw the light of the day begin to fade for the first time, and the sun beginning to disappear? Whatever he might have thought, I should think his thoughts would practically correspond to the experience of the Christian Church at the time when this book was written. They saw that the darkness was setting in, and the question to them was: Is this the end, or what? Is there nothing better coming? "Keep on!" said Christ. "They that keep

my works to the end, faltering not, shall have the morning star. I will give you something in your hearts which tells you though it may be dark, it is the darkness before dawn, not the darkness before the night." That is the morning star—the star of hope in times of darkness and of doubt—that in the heart of the man who believes, that tells him everything is not to end in night. It is Christian optimism, if you like to put it so. The morning star is the consciousness of the coming day, even when the day has not come.

Well now, in these days of growing materialism and carelessness, to get the promise realised in our own experience would be a very great thing indeed. "I will give him the morning star"—something in the heart of a man that tells him there is always a better day coming. Think of it. I want at any rate to leave this promise in your mind. Think of it in its bearing upon personal salvation. "I will give him the morning star." That is, I will give him some certainty that all is well with him, in spite of all appearances to the contrary. Also think of it for a moment in its bearing upon the ultimate triumph of truth. "I will give him the morning star"—I will give him some consciousness, that although things may now appear to be going wrong, still, what is before us is not night, but day.

"I will give him the morning star": that has to do with personal salvation. When we get an idea we ride it to death, and now we have got the idea of Socialism. I am not speaking of politi-

cal matters, but of the idea we have got into our heads that we must do everything for somebody else. Of course, that is right. You remember our Lord told us to love our neighbour as ourselves. But I don't think He ever told us to love our neighbour more than ourselves. I don't think He told us not to love ourselves. Let us be sane about these matters. Truth, as a rule, you know, is in the mean, between the two extremes, as the old Greeks taught. It may be a splendid doctrine, but you know you cannot get on in your business in the city if you are always trying to get people to buy in the shop on the other side of the street. You must sometimes try to get them into your own! There is nothing un-Christian about that. Self-denial does not mean self-neglect. And I think it is quite a narrow and ignorant way of putting it to say it is wrong to appeal to a man to study his own interests in the things of the Spirit. One of the first appeals which the Gospel makes to a man is to protect his own soul. Even though we wish everything well with the world, we want to know all things are not wrong with our own selves. "I will give him the morning star." That means something that tells a man in spite of all his shortcomings, doubts, sorrows, anxieties, that the great things are settled. What are the conditions before you can have a morning star? They are very simple. There can be no morning star until the night is already gone. It may not be day, but still the worst is over. It is morning again. I remember in my own country a poor, simple

labourer taking part in a prayer meeting and thanking God with a loud Hallelujah because we were in the wilderness. I was a boy then, and I did not quite understand where the particular blessing was in being in the wilderness. But he knew what he was talking about. "We praise Thy Name," he said, "because we are together here in the wilderness, for at one time we were in Egypt." To be in the wilderness means that you have taken a great decision. You are not at the end of the journey by any means, but still, the worst is past, and fought, and conquered. "I will give him the morning star." That means the man who has gone through the night of doubt and sorrow, who has faced the worst, and overcome it. Then again, there may be no morning star unless it is followed by the sunrise, and the dawn, and the full day. The morning star would be a lie if there was no day after it. It is a prophetic star. You remember Tennyson spoke of 'sunset and evening star'—something to remind him that the end had come to a splendid life. But here it is not the sunset and evening star, but sunrise and morning star! The best is yet to be! We want this morning star. We are so inclined to be alarmed. There is a passing phase in the history of the Church to-day. The Church seems to have lost her hold on the lives of the people. Be of good courage! As Christ said, He has overcome the world. It was a strange expression, when you remember the conditions under which it was uttered, for Christ was then being led to the Cross, followed by a howling mob.

Spiritual victory may not be apparent, it may even look like defeat. But if you have the morning star you will understand where the victory lies, and your mind will be at peace. I want you to go out from this service with a joyful heart about yourself and about the world. God is in His heaven. He is "behind the shadow, keeping watch above His own." Strive on! Leave the consequences to Him. Do your duty, whatever it is, and mind you do the duty that is nearest. In some time to come the morning star of hope in your hearts will merge, will vanish in the day, for as sure as God has spoken, the day shall come, and the shadows shall flee away.

#### XIV.

### JESUS CHRIST EVER THE SAME.

*"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."*—HEBREWS xiii. 8.

THESE words, so simple and yet so profound, so well-known and yet so imperfectly understood, are introduced here to answer a twofold purpose. In the first place, they are words of consolation, and in the second place, they are meant to be words of warning. That the Christians to whom they are addressed stood in need of consolation is suggested in the previous verse: "Remember them which have," or, perhaps more correctly, "which had the rule over you, who have spoken," or, rather, "who spake unto you the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." These words plainly refer to the great leaders and teachers of the past, whom God had taken to Himself. The mission of these men, and of those who came to carry on their work, is further explained in the seventeenth verse: "for they watch over," or in behalf of, "your souls." This implies the most solemn responsibility ever entrusted to men by the great Head of the Church. They watch over your *souls*—not over your worldly affairs, not over your bodily health, but "over your souls." It is hard to grasp the true meaning of this. There are two dangers which



those upon whom this responsibility is laid must try to avoid. On the one hand, it is possible, by neglect, to fall short of fulfilling this unique trust. A minister may become like those shepherds spoken of in the Prophets, who thought only of themselves and neglected the care of their flocks. And still, on the other hand, there is a corresponding, and, it may be, a greater danger of misunderstanding the commission. This watching over the souls of men does not imply any priestly rule over the conscience. That is the prerogative of God alone. The mission is prophetic rather than priestly—the men appointed of God to this solemn responsibility were to “speak the word of God,” and to exemplify and emphasise that word by the lives they led.

But their work was finished—the work of the great leaders “who had the rule” over them; their warfare had come to an end. They had been translated into God’s presence. Only their message and their faith remained: “Whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.” They still, in this sense, continue to belong to the Church they had left. They are not, however, themselves present any more, but Jesus Christ is forever the same.

Again, these words are meant to answer another purpose, which is suggested in the words which follow. The words of my present text are not only words of consolation about the past, but also words of warning about the future. “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.” What then? “Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.” The people had lost their old

teachers, and were now surrounded by new teachers and a new kind of teaching. These new doctrines are said to be "divers" and "strange." They were "divers doctrines;" that is, they were not consistent with each other. The revelation given to the world in Christianity is the vastest of all the stores of truth. In fact, there is no truth outside Christianity. It is the sum of all truth. Yet every truth it contains, however small, is in perfect concord with every other truth, and all its truths together form one organic whole. But these "doctrines" were not of this kind. They were "divers" doctrines. They were self-destructive, because they were not self-consistent. The work of the Church is not to destroy error, but to preach the truth. Error will destroy itself. We need not devour the critics, even if we could; we can go on our way in peace, the critics, if they lack truth, will eventually devour one another. "Divers" doctrines cannot stand.

And these doctrines were not only "divers;" they were also "strange," that is, they did not agree with the spirit of the revelation already given. The early Christians were not men of culture. The heretics were often more cultured, yet these simple men "kept the faith" intact, because they possessed that spiritual perception which enabled them to see the drift of all new doctrines. They detected "strange" doctrines from afar. And these new truths, which were not truths, were continually changing. I read the other day that one of the outer walls of one of our famous castles on the coast of Wales had come down. I was somewhat sorry, but

not greatly surprised, for those ancient castles have stood well, and long may they stand. But on the following day there was a curious, and a most interesting, explanation given. It was not the old castle that had come down at all. About twenty years ago someone tried his hand at restoration, and built an arch to support, as he thought, the tottering wall. It was this that fell, and the grand old towers must have looked upon the pile of stones with a degree of contempt. Ancient truths remain, and men are ever coming back to them; it is the new-fangled notions, the "strange" doctrines, that decline and fall.

Yet for a time these formed an element of danger in and to the Church. They may "carry people about," but they mean no progress. The words are not, be not "carried on," or carried away, "by divers and strange doctrines," but, be not "carried about." They disturb the mind, but they never lead to anything. The mind ought therefore to be firmly established by its grasp on the never-changing Christ. Be not "carried about" by anything, but cling to the Christ "who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

These words may be understood in two ways. Christ may be said to be ever the same as a Divine Person and as an historical character. In the primary sense He partakes of the inherent immutability of the divine nature. In this sense the verse agrees with what we find in the first chapter: "They shall perish; but Thou remainest . . . they shall be changed; but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall

not fail." According to what is known as the Kenotic Theory our Lord emptied Himself of His divine attributes when He became man. Yet, inasmuch as He was divine, He was above change even when He was in the flesh. These words, however, have greater force, in the connection in which we find them here, if we take them as referring to our Lord's place in the history of the world. As the historical Christ He is ever the same. The truth here is not transcendental, but historical.

One of Science's great axioms is the Unity of Nature. To trace this unity amidst all the apparent diversity of method and aim is the task of the scientific man. Nature, when viewed superficially, is very contradictory; when deeply studied it is found to be one. The same is true of history, and what these words teach is that history is one in Christ. He is the great Central Figure which makes history intelligible and makes it all one. He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." He belongs not to a period, but to all periods; not to one place, but to all places. All the events of the world's history take their place in their several relations to Him.

Guided then by this thought I shall remark—and that very briefly, though the subject is vast—

I. *That in Christ we find the true meaning of the past.* "Jesus Christ the same yesterday."

Every true reformer lives on the past, and we cannot cut ourselves away from it. The way to lead

the world on is to continually lead it back—back to first principles and past experiences. John the Baptist was a great reformer who endeavoured by all he said and did to lead the people back to the teachings of Isaiah and Amos. Luther tried to lead the wandering Church of the Middle Ages, which had completely lost its way in the labyrinth of its own ritual and speculation, back to the simple teachings of apostolic times. There has been in recent years a great national awakening in Wales, accompanied by the study of the past and by the re-printing of old books and the re-studying of forgotten authors. We look back to-day upon the past and find that Christ is its meaning and purpose. The past culminates in Him. Even history is divided to the time before and the time after He came. He was in the world before He came into it as the incarnate Son of God. As St. John says (i. 10), "He was in the world, and the world knew Him not." We can trace some preparation for His coming in all the mighty nations of the world at that time, but one nation had been set apart exclusively to prepare for His advent. That was the special mission of the Jews. The mission of the Roman was to teach law and conquest; the mission of the Greek was to teach philosophy and art; the mission of the Jew was to proclaim the coming of Christ. And it is strange to think that the Jews, who are now the most material of nations, and in whose possession is nearly one half the wealth of the world, at one period in their history led the world in the knowledge of spiritual truth. The most spiritual things in the world to-day have come

through the Jews. But they crucified the Christ—the Central Figure of their past—and fell away.

And who can tell what Christ is now to the life of the world? He has not simply entered it at one point; He has captured it at all points. Even granting that you do not recognise Him as the incarnate Son of God and the divine Saviour of the world, you will not—you can not—make up history without Him. Henry Rogers once had a very remarkable dream. He was at the time writing his well-known book upon the Bible. In his dream he saw all Bibles taken out of the world, and, not only that, but all things in every other book which it was possible to trace to the influence of the Bible. "And then," he states, "I saw that there was hardly a book in the country that was worth reading and none worth buying." As all that is best in literature can be traced to the Book of books, even in the same way all that is best in history can be seen to have its centre in Christ. Take Him out of poetry, and all that is best in poetry is gone. Take Him out of the music of the world, and you rob music of its glory. Take Him out of art, and the greatest pictures and the noblest buildings in the world are vanished. Yea, take Him out of your own experience of the past, and what remains? He was the stay of our forefathers, and the Prince of our youth. He is the Central Figure of the past.

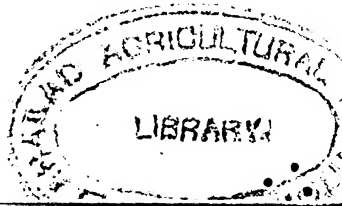
II. *He who was the meaning of the past, remains to-day the greatest power in the life of the world.* He who was yesterday is the "same to-day." The

historical Christ is the living Christ. In the Biography of Dr. Dale we are told that the great preacher one day sat pondering over certain events in the life and death of Christ when the thought that Christ is alive came to him anew with all the force of a supernatural revelation. He Who then lived in Galilee lives here and now. He is much more than a figure in history: He is alive. Our creed is much broader than the fact that Christ lived and died in Palestine about two thousand years ago, its most sublime teaching is that He who then lived and died lives here and now.

The nature of the work which He does in the world to-day is so spiritual that we are not able to judge it. We can never understand "to-day" until "to-morrow." Yet His work is being carried on. Christianity, we are sometimes told, is "played out." Not quite! It is a commonplace retort to say that it has not been properly "played in" yet, still that is quite true. Christianity is the greatest force in the life of the world to-day. But it works by quiet means, not by revolutionary means. It changes men from within. Heaven is satisfied with results that would hardly do for some of us. "There shall be joy in the presence of the angels of God . . . ." Now, it must require something great to create any new joy in the heart of those who have always dwelt in the abundant joy of the Divine Presence. What caused the joy? Was it a great religious awakening, and the flocking of thousands of souls to the Church? No! It was something that happened to "one sinner." Only one! What

then has that one done? Has he been justified and sanctified? Has he conquered all his foes? Does he stand spotless before the throne of God? No, not yet; he has only repented. He could hardly do anything less if he did anything at all. Yet "there shall be joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." God is pleased with small results, provided they are real and true. Thus Christianity carries on its work in the world without attracting notice. The significance of the present will only be understood in the future.

The greatest blessings of the present are due to the fact that Christ still lives. I remember reading of a Flower Show held in London in connection with which a somewhat new and strange idea was introduced. No flowers were to be exhibited except those which had been brought into this country subsequent to the Coronation of Queen Victoria. It appears that a vast number of flowers are now grown in England which were not to be found here in those early days. But the Coronation of the Queen had nothing whatever to do with the introduction and growth of those flowers. My friends, the most beautiful flowers and the most glorious fruits in the life of the world to-day have come into it subsequent to the coming of Christ in the flesh. He healed the sick when he lived here, and He still does it in numberless hospitals that would never have been built were it not for Him. It does not require much skill to trace the connection between an orphanage and the Incarnation. The poor, and even the prisoners in their cells, know that He has come. Christianity





is the glory of our modern life. "The same to-day."

III. *That same Christ is the only hope of humanity for the future.* "And for ever." We ought to take a wide view of the future. What is to become of the world? What will be the ultimate fate of Britain? Will civilisation travel Westward and leave our country as Rome and the Empires of the East were left? Was Macaulay right when he dreamt that he saw a savage from the ends of the earth sketching the ruins of St. Paul's? We cannot say, but one thing we know, the hope of the future is in Christ?

And what is to become of us? In the eternity towards which we are hastening what will be our portion? This we know: the Christ of to-day will be the same "for ever." Trust Him. He alone remains for ever the same. John Ruskin during one of his first visits to the Alps fell reverently on his knees to thank God for creating those solid mountains in this fleeting world. But we know of One Who will remain the same when the mountains are no more. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." Amen.

## XV.

### FORM AND POWER.

*"Having (R.V. holding) a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof."*—2 TIMOTHY iii. 5.

THE Apostle here gives a graphic and terrible picture of the perilous times that are to come upon the Church in the last days. The expression "last days" in the New Testament refers usually to the whole New Testament dispensation, as contrasted with that of the Old Testament. "God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake, in time past, unto the fathers by the prophets, hath, in these last days, spoken to us in his Son." In the words of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the "last days" are the days of the Gospel, as distinguished from the "time past," which was the day of the prophets. Often in the Epistles, however, the words refer, not to the Christian dispensation as a whole, but to the concluding part of that period, the time immediately preceding the second coming of our Lord. This must be the meaning here, for the apostles taught, and the Church expected, that the day of the Lord was at hand.

It is remarkable that this period should be looked forward to as a period of general gloom and acute distress to the Church of Christ. It would be natural to expect that the dark and perilous days would, by that time, be in the past, and that the influence

of Christianity upon the life of the world would be well-nigh complete in its triumph. Still it seems to be a great universal principle in History that the periods immediately preceding all great Reformations are periods of darkness and reaction. It was so when Christ Himself came, and it has been so on the eve of all Reforms and Revivals, whether of Learning or Piety, ever since.

In these dark days, "men shall be lovers of their own selves." The form of the words implies, not merely that such men can then be found, if searched for: it means that the *majority* of men will be such. What a time it will be when most men will be "covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemous, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. The question naturally suggests itself, will there be a Church at all in the world then? Will there be any faith left on the earth? Will religion, in all its forms, be dead and forgotten? The words of our text supply the startling answer. *These evil men will constitute the Church.* For they will all be "holding a form of godliness." The world will not lack schools, churches, societies and formal piety even then. There will be a well-equipped Church, though the faithful be few, and the time that of general, spiritual death. This suggests a worse possibility, even than empty Churches — Churches filled by the wrong men. And it would not be amiss if we solemnly and prayerfully con-

sidered whether these terrible words are not, after all, to some extent a picture of our own day.

• Our subject is *Religion as an outward Form which we must hold, and an inward Power which we must not deny.*

I. And, first, comes the Form of Godliness which is a thing that we must, at all hazards, cling to. Godliness might no doubt be taken here to mean religion as a practical theory of life,—faith as holy works. For all true faith must issue in works. In this aspect of it, religion may be contrasted with inward feeling, and with outward devotions. Religion is an attitude of soul to God and the world, expressing itself in, and enriching itself by, corresponding ritual, elaborate or simple, as the soul may need. But here godliness means the actual application of Christian principles to life and its varied problems. This necessarily implies the faith, which is within and without. By the “power of godliness” we mean that truth and reality of faith in the soul which ensures the full, adequate and constant application of Christian principles to practice. Most men, however bad, have their good moments. Herod, we are told, was particularly fond of John the Baptist as a Preacher, “and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly” (Mark vi. 20). Yet the fixed course of his evil life was not changed; and he, in the end, killed the man he so greatly admired. Reality makes thoroughness and permanency certain. All men may be godly at times, and in a fashion. Only those who are

truly so can be expected to be always consistent in life, and faithful unto death.

St. Paul, who describes the Gospel as "the power of God unto salvation," refers in his Epistles to three forms at least of spiritual power: the "power of sin" (R.V. 1 Cor. xv. 56), the "power of resurrection" (Phil. iii. 10), and the "power of godliness." The "power of sin is the Law;" that is, the dominion of sin in the soul is developed and not lessened by the law (Rom. vii.); and it is sin that makes the law strong to condemn. Against it, and always fighting and conquering it, stands the mystic power which was active in our Lord's victory over death, and which is conveyed through faith into the soul as the "power of His resurrection." It is the only power stronger than sin. When sin is thus vanquished, a new power becomes dominant in the heart and the life,—the power of godliness." It is a spiritual dynamic, based upon the victorious work of Christ, and it gradually transforms the whole man.

The "form" of this godliness will be tenaciously held by men who know nothing of its power. To this point, let us give careful heed. There are two kinds of "form": the form which is the opposite of reality, and the form in which reality clothes and expresses itself. The word has this second meaning here. The form of godliness is not condemned, nor the holding of it. On the contrary: the neglect of it will seriously hamper the soul. The "form" is as necessary to the "power" as the body is to the soul,—their separation is

death. The two may be compared to the chaff and the grain. There was a time when the chaff protected the wheat, and was indispensable to its development. Still, apart from the grain, and when its work is done, there is no place for it but the fire. It nevertheless had once its sphere of use. Or, take language and thought, as illustrating the same thing. Is language a condition of thought? Can a man think at all except in words? At any rate, language is the usual form of thought-expression. In language thought reveals and fulfils itself. In ~~our~~ own day the study of language is regarded as one of the fundamental requirements of culture. Much thought is spent upon minute points of style. Yet language is nothing apart from the thought or feeling it may express. So is the form of godliness—the outward manifestation of godliness in devotions, creeds and sacraments is indispensable to the growth of true religion, and yet, apart from the reality, these things are a mere pretence, a sham and a snare. One may hold the form and yet deny the power; and this denial means more than any verbal declaration. One cannot deny a faith in mere words,—it is done in deeds when we profess that we know God, and yet in our lives deny Him. Still, religion is a form which we are to hold.

II. It is, also, a Power which, at our soul's peril, we dare not deny. There is in these days a danger that men may cease to hold even the form. This is a grave peril in Protestant and Free Church atmospheres. We must get back to the New Testament idea of the Church. Most of us have no con-

ception of a Church at all. All the religion we possess is intensely individualistic. The Church life counts for far too little in the lives of ordinary Christian men. Women, both here and on the Continent, are supposed to be more devoted to religious forms than men are. A friend of mine once made inquiries when staying at different hotels both in this country and in America, and he found the same deplorable condition of things in both countries. Roman Catholic girls in service at these places were usually devoted to their Church, and felt they had to attend its ministry, or starve their souls. Often they had been to a morning service before anyone else was about. Protestant maids, on the other hand, who were otherwise blameless, seemed to attach no importance to this. The chief use of the Church to them was as a meeting place for members and their friends on Sunday evenings; and the management in these hotels appeared, if anything, to give the preference to girls who would not feel the need of regular attendance at any place of worship. The fact remains—the Protestant as a rule does not go to Church. In England, taken alone, we are told that there is not room for more than one third of the population in all the places of worship of all descriptions in the land. And these places are never full. More than one half the Christians of this country seem to have no fixed habits of religious worship at all. They do not hold even the form. How can they know the power?

But, if we have the power, the form will look after itself. Without the "power," the "form" is

vain and ineffective. Why so? For one thing, because the religious life must be a life of *growth*. There is no life in mere form, however faithfully and aesthetically held. Form will never develop into anything greater than itself. As someone said, it is like a suit of clothes with no one inside. The power possesses the force of life itself. And there is no power like life, even in its lowest forms. There are small plants which, if they get a hold at all, will in time pull to pieces the soundest masonry. They will indeed split the rock. The great and vital thing ~~is to~~ have root within ourselves. We are often more concerned to have showy flowers, and we are always impatient for results. But the true force of things is invisible. Truth's proper home is in the inward parts. There is, it is true, some kind of development in hypocrisy and sham. We find that taught in this chapter (verse 13): "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." The man at first tries simply to deceive others: he very soon contrives to deceive himself. In the end, he will attempt even to deceive God. "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name have cast out devils, and in Thy name done many wonderful works?" Yet they are men who held simply the form. God never knew them at all.

Again: We are in the world, not only to grow, but to *withstand*. For this we need power. The attacks made upon the individual soul and the Church are many and subtle. Mere form will not sustain us. Nor will any sudden outbursts of enthu-



siasm. St. Peter declared, with great passion, that he would always be loyal to his Master, whatever happened. Yet, that very same night, he denied Him more than once with oaths. Sentiment is unreliable unless backed up by fixed principles. The Church needs something more than brilliant flights of zeal: it thrives on steady work alone. That work may be quiet and yet effective,—like a light shining in the world. I was in South Wales the other day, staying at a house overlooking a beautiful bay. My host, standing at one of the windows, when we were retiring to rest, said, "My mother kept a lamp burning here for fifty years, for the guidance of those at sea." I am not aware that anyone had asked her to do this, and certainly she was not paid for it. The lamp was not necessary for her own house; but by and by the sailors came to know that light and learned to fix their course by it. It never failed them. Some of them, probably, had never seen the coast without it. One night of neglect might have meant the losing of many lives and the darkening of many homes. But it never did fail. The Church of Christ needs such men and women,—who will serve her in all weathers. Christ asks for men He can count upon whatever may befall. They will not be men of mere form.

And, finally, we are in the world to *attack*. The mission of the Church is to watch and warn the world in the Lord's name. Often we have to stand for God, and suffer for so doing. And we must do more than stand. The Church will not even maintain her ground if she is always on the defensive.

The best defence is to attack. It is well to walk around Zion counting the battlements and marking well the bulwarks: but we must also bring down the fortresses of the enemy. We need God's power for this. The word for power here is the one we get the word *dynamite* from. "The weapons of our warfare are mighty to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." For this we need, not only daring and patience, but a kind of spiritual skill. And behind and through all, we must be made "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might, putting on the whole armour of God that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood." If we fail, we fail for lack of that power which is always within our reach.

I speak to men and women who are holding the form of godliness valiantly. Are we denying the power? Our organisation is complete, what about our driving force? I met a friend lately who had just settled in Wales. He had come from the plains of England. He told me, "I have already found that my car will not suit. The hills are too steep and too numerous. I must get one of greater power." It may be, brethren, that such faith as we have has served us hitherto, for we have not yet been sorely tried. The real trials are before us. Perilous times are still ahead. May the peace and power of God nourish and sustain our souls even unto the end. Amen.

## XVI.

### THE LIFE ETERNAL.

*"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."*—JOHN xvii. 3.

THESE words form a portion of our Lord's great intercessory prayer, and are, in the first place, an explanation of the petition made in verses 1 and 2.

"These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." A twofold idea is suggested in these words, that is, that men—saved men—are the gift of God the Father to the Son. We find this thought again in the twelfth verse: "those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost." This giving of men to Christ is one of the root-ideas of the Redemption pictured in the New Testament. And based upon it comes the gift which Christ Himself is authorised to give to men: "that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him."

"And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (vi. 40). The words which I have read

are introduced by way of an explanation of the meaning of this great and supreme gift. "And this is life eternal"—this is the gift of Christ to all believing hearts—"that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." It is to this knowledge of God that I desire now to invite your attention.

The essence of true religion is ever the same under all dispensations throughout the world and for all time, though its forms and creeds continually vary. "To know God" is the phrase commonly employed in the Scriptures when what is essential to Christianity is contrasted with what is only accidental and supplementary. It is evident that inward faith must have an outward form. A "form of godliness" is not only valid by divine injunction, but the necessity for it is based upon our common human nature. All our feelings must be clothed in suitable forms. The sorrow of the heart within, if it cannot express itself in tears without, is destructive to the soul. We have read of people overwhelmed with grief who lost their reason because they were not able to weep. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old." It is the same with joy. God has given us the power to laugh, and He will certainly not be angry if we occasionally use that power. There are some whose conception of religion is that it is something which is accompanied by much weeping, and in their view a spiritually-minded man should not be given to laughter. Weeping is thought to be of the Lord, and laughter of the devil. Were I constrained to say that the devil is

x

the father of either, I should certainly prefer to say that he is the father of our tears. Laughter was in the world before pain ever entered into it. And God means some day to "wipe all tears from our eyes," but even at His right hand "there are pleasures for ever more." But for us now both are legitimate forms by means of which we can reveal the state of our heart. And on this principle religion must have its forms. The crusade of the present day, however misdirected it may seem to many, is not instigated by any desire to divest religion of all its forms. It is rather a protest against the substitution of "form" for "spirit." In contra-distinction to all forms, however simple or however elaborate, the essence of all true religion is a spiritual knowledge of God.

Further, religion is to be distinguished from the morality which springs from it. It is to be distinguished in thought, though it cannot be separated in fact. The "root of the matter" cannot remain long in any heart but that the fruit of the matter becomes discernible in the life. The great defence of Christianity is that it produces men of high moral aspirations. Yet religion itself is deeper than the morality it produces. Its seat is in the heart. It is contained in a mystic correspondence between the heart and God in Christ. In a word, its essence is to know "the only true God, and Jesus Christ" Whom God hath sent.

To "know God," then, is primarily more emotional than intellectual. It implies that the heart is in sympathy with God, partaking, according to an-

other saying of St. John (cf. 1 John iv. 7), of God's love. "Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." The illustration has often been used, still it will answer here, of two musical instruments properly tuned, and placed in their proper position. If a chord is touched in one the corresponding chord in the other may be heard answering to it, owing to a certain law of sympathy which exists in the realm of musical sound. Now, to know God is something similar. God is in heaven; He is ruler of all. Man is on earth, engaged in the concerns of the seen. Yet the heart of the man has been so touched and tuned by the Spirit of Christ, that no desires spring out of it which are not in perfect harmony with the mind of God. And no divine command comes down from heaven to which the human heart is not at once ready to offer willing obedience. Such a heart is in touch with the mind of God, and of that heart it is true to say that it knoweth God.

"And this is life eternal." You will observe that this contains more than saying that this knowledge of God is the condition of the acceptance of eternal life. It is life eternal. And why? Because, first of all, the human soul is made for God, and the activities of the soul can never exercise themselves fully except when they are fixed upon Him. The thought I wish to impress upon your minds, and upon my own mind as well, is, that this life eternal is possible only through the eternal development of all that is in man. That development, again, is pos-

sible only in God, Whom we are to know through Jesus Christ Whom He hath sent.

As a substitute for God in the development of the soul men very often offer the world. To the seen and temporal is given that work to be done which can only be done by the unseen and the spiritual. And we are so encompassed by the world, its clamouring demands are so loud and persistent, that there is no sin which so besets men to-day as living a life of sense instead of a life of faith. The tyranny of the visible is so great that we forget the beyond. Yet, as our Lord has put it, "what shall a man profit, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" I cannot myself believe that the full import of those words is given in the common interpretation that a man, by gaining the whole world in this life, loses his soul in the world to come. Rather we should regard the whole process, the gaining and the losing, as going on side by side in the present world. That is, perhaps, made more evident in the words as they are given by St. Luke (ix. 25, R.V.): "For what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose or forfeit his own self?" The point seems to be, that no man can gain the whole world, even legitimately, and retain his own self. It is a truism about man that if any of his powers are left without being nourished and exercised and developed he will, eventually, be deprived of those powers. A man, in the process of gaining the whole world, would certainly exercise and train some of the powers within him to their utmost capacity, and yet leave other deeper and diviner

powers of his nature utterly neglected and unused. There is nothing in the "world" to call those powers into activity, and, as a result, they would in the end be entirely lost.

Is not this the lesson which George Eliot means to teach us in "Silas Marner"? Silas, in his early days, was a man of a large heart and wide and warm sympathies. But he was disappointed. He then became misanthropic, and retired from the world. In his retirement his chief delight was to amass wealth, to gather together as much gold as he possibly could. To this end he devoted years after years. But the whole point of the story is, that as his wealth increased, as his gold grew in bulk, the soul of Silas Marner gradually withered away and shrivelled into nothing. His treasure increased, but his soul contracted. His wealth waxed great, but his sympathies became smaller and feebler; until at last he became, even in his own eyes, narrow, shrunken, mean and contemptible. He was in this way a concrete instance, on a small scale, of a man gaining the whole world and forfeiting his own self. All who follow the same course must inevitably come to the same end. For to be worldly-minded, as well as to be carnally-minded, is death; to be spiritually-minded is life and peace.

It follows, therefore, that the life, the true higher life, of the soul is in God, and "to know God" is "life eternal."

I. *It is by means of this knowledge*—to mention one or two thoughts directly connected with this



theme—that we finally find the true function of the intellect in religion. While it is made clear in the New Testament that spiritual knowledge does not start in the intellect and then find its culmination in faith, yet is it made evident that spiritual vision has a reflex effect upon the reasoning powers. Thus St. Paul traces all knowledge to the knowledge of God. He prays for the Ephesians that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,” may give unto them, “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.” The Church, in virtue of its knowledge of God is to become the possessor, not of a definite revelation regarding certain well-defined points of doctrine or of conduct, but of the “spirit of wisdom and revelation,” by which it may know all things which it ought to know. And St. John declares that the saints do, as a matter of fact, know all things. “Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.” “Ye need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things.” This sympathy with the divine implies a full knowledge of God. A man could never attain to it by means of mere intellect. “The world, through its wisdom, knew not God.” It is both instructive and interesting to follow the attempts made by human wisdom to grapple with the problem of the Divine Being. Left to itself the wisdom of the world invariably led men to extremes of error. In the apostolic age St. Paul was troubled with certain people who called themselves “Gnostics,” that is, with a class of men who, in their admiration of the power of their own intellect, would

have it that human reason was capable of solving every mystery. In their view, God Himself and all that He had made, could be thoroughly comprehended by the mind of man.

That error was exploded, but to-day we have another of an opposite kind. To-day, instead of Gnostics, we have Agnostics. Formerly it was taught that man could know everything of God; to-day it is said that no knowledge of the divine and supernatural is within the reach of our minds at all. Human intellect, then, cannot fathom God, but a purified human heart can know Him. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

This spiritual knowledge of God leads to that moral intuition which is to be the guide of life for the Christian. The spiritual man can draw ethical distinctions, not necessarily in an intellectual sense, but by means of a new power which he acquires by communion with the Unseen. It can be compared with the ear of the musician. By natural bent, as well as by constant care and study, the musician has trained his ear to detect the faintest trace of discord. The least discord gives him acute pain, whilst another man would feel no alarm even if all the possible discords of the universe were packed into one piece of music. In a like manner, knowledge of God and communion with Him refines the moral sense, so that, even apart from any formal commandment, sin is at once detected and its presence causes acute pain. The man who knows God needs no law; he is a law unto himself. Some men are "gentlemen" by education; others are so by

nature. The man who is a gentleman by nature wins our trust to a greater extent than the other. The man who has simply been taught how to do the right thing might easily forget his instructions, but the other man has it in him to do that which is right. In the same way, the fully equipped and developed Christian "cannot sin; for he is *born of God*."

II. This knowledge of God, is life once more, not only because it corrects and develops the intellectual faculties in man, *but because it also forms the great inspiration to the effort to realise the ideal set before him*. It is one thing that a man should know his duty. The power to know one's duty comes from God, but the power to do it is equally divine in its origin. "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits" (Daniel xi. 32). The word "exploits" is not in the original language: "and they are the people *who do*." They are not, like many, mere talkers; to them God is not a theological or philosophical conception but an ethical reality.

Now this deep conviction of spiritual things is one of the most signal needs of our own day. The measure of a man's power is to be found not in his knowledge but in his faith. We now more than ever need men who have convictions. Someone has said: "Give to the world your convictions, it is already burdened with sufficient doubts." And this faith is at the heart of the knowledge of God of which the text speaks. This was the strength of Moses, of whom it is said that "he endured as

seeing him who is invisible." You will also call to mind the words spoken of St. Paul by Festus when he brought the Apostle to the notice of king Agrippa, "But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive" (Acts xxv. 19). This was the spirit caught by Dr. Dale of Birmingham when he said: "We have apologised for Christ long enough, and He has no need of our apology; our duty now is to proclaim Him." He who "knows" God has grasped Him as the only Reality. He has taken a firm hold of God, and God has taken a firm hold of him. And this is what gives him a mission in life.

All true men of God have a message to deliver and a mission to fulfil. The revelation of God has come to them through Jesus Christ "whom he has sent." And they in turn have all been sent (verse 18). "As thou has sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." Their mission is to complete their Master's work. It is not to conquer God's enemies, for they have been overcome, but rather to pursue them. Asahel could not conquer Abner, but he could overtake him in flight. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James iv. 7). Only the man who knows God knows sin, and fights it in his own heart and in the world. He is God's co-worker.

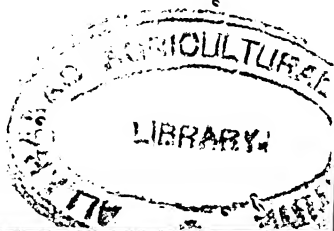
III. Finally, *this knowledge of God, which elevates and purifies man's nature within, is the germ which will gradually develop into the full and per-*

*fect life of the world to come.* "Life eternal" in the writings of St. John is a brilliant prospect as well as the highest and richest of present possessions. In spiritual things the law of possession is vision. In earthly things, though we may enjoy what we see, we do not necessarily possess it. One of the most interesting sights of London is the Royal Mint. There a man may see gold beyond the dreams of avarice. Still the man is no richer when he comes out than he was when he entered. But the eye of faith makes a man possessor of all the spiritual realities which he beholds. That is the bargain we strike with the Eternal: all we can see is ours. He who knows God has made Him his own inheritance. It is a beautiful thought of David's when he declares that he was no longer his own, but that he had given himself over in body and mind for time and eternity to God. But the corollary of this thought is still more beautiful in its daring, for David declares, not merely that he is God's, but that, in some inexplicable way, God is also his. "The Lord is my portion and mine inheritance." This is to know God, and this is life eternal—a man who has given himself wholly to God, and a man to whom consequently God has given Himself in return, living in continual realisation of this blessed exchange. This is verily to know "the only true God."

The *objective truth* which forms the basis and security of this subjective experience is the Incarnation and Work of Jesus Christ "Whom he hath sent." "If ye had known me ye should have known

my Father also." "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." "No man hath seen God at any time, the only-begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." The whole question therefore resolves itself into this: "What think ye of Christ?" "This is the work of God, that ye believe in him whom he hath sent." What is God to you? What are you to God? There was a tradition at Oxford that a lady once asked the late Master of Balliol, Benjamin Jowett, what he thought of God. After a brief silence the Master replied: "What I think of God, madam, matters very little; what God thinks of me matters a great deal."

*Heaven is life, activity, service.* Jacob on his deathbed had a sentimental objection to dying in Egypt, and his last injunction was that his bones at least should rest in the land of promise. His wish was carried out. But heaven is not for the dead. It is a place of full, vigorous life. This germ of knowledge will there grow, eternally grow. "For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor. xiii. 12). It is a "life" the consummation of which is the clear, beatific vision of God.



## XVII.

### THE WISDOM OF GOD.

*"Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth;  
and my delights were with the sons of men."*—  
PROVERBS viii. 31.

THIS book forms a portion of the wonderful Wisdom Literature of the Hebrews. The doctrine of God's Wisdom was the characteristic doctrine of this period in Old Testament history. It is clearly akin to the doctrine of the Word in St. John's Gospel. The divine method of teaching seems to be to take one great truth at a time. In the History of Doctrine we shall find that, in the main, every great truth has its own period, and every period its own truth. In this period the predominant doctrine was that of the "Wisdom of God."

Of God's Wisdom in its relation to men two things are emphasised in this verse and the verse which immediately follows it. We have, first of all, God's Wisdom *delighting in men*: "my delights were with the sons of men." Then we have God's Wisdom *directing men*: "Now, therefore, hearken unto me, O ye children; for blessed are they that keep my ways." Let us then direct our thoughts to these points.

I. *We shall consider, firstly, the delight which God's Wisdom takes in mankind.*

But, first of all, what is meant here by the Wisdom of God? There are two kinds of passages in which we find a reference to God's Wisdom. In the one class of passages it is the *subject* about which inspired men talk and write. That is intelligible. But in other passages, even more numerous—and so here—we find the Wisdom of God itself talking to men concerning itself. This is not so easily explained. In the words of the text it is not that Wisdom is spoken about, but it is a case where Wisdom speaks.

The simplest and most convenient explanation is to say that this is poetry. This is the usual covering placed over Old Testament difficulties. And there is an element of truth in it. The Eastern mind in its study of nature was more poetical than analytical. We are more inclined to dissect than to personify. There is here, however, more than poetic imagery. We have here not a personification merely, but a Person. For proof of this we turn to the New Testament. The great and fundamental ideas of Revelation run through the Bible from beginning to end. We find their roots in the Old Testament, and their full fruition in the New. The Bible is its own expositor. The best theologian is the man who knows his Bible well, who can bring one verse to cast light upon another, and who is able to trace the gradual development of God's truth in the revelation which He has given of it.



The two great apostles of Wisdom in New Testament times were St. James and St. Paul. St. John was pre-eminently the apostle of Love, and St. Peter the apostle of Faith. But St. James and St. Paul had their thoughts centred rather in the Wisdom of God.

The Inspiration of the Spirit did not do away with the personal characteristics of each of these two writers, and, consequently, the Wisdom of God is not spoken of by the two from the same standpoint. St. James was an eminently practical man. He can hardly be called a Theologian at all, and he certainly was not a Poet. He was just the type of man to serve with distinction on Executive Committees; he was "a *servant* of Jesus Christ." He had very little faith in creed and feeling, apart from corresponding works. He had no respect for orthodoxy where it was not accompanied by high morality; for he assures us in his own blunt way that the devil is orthodox enough; he believes and trembles.

To such a practical mind the Wisdom of God is a very practical thing. "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

St. Paul takes a deeper view, which is, however, quite consistent with that of St. James, because it underlies it. To him the Wisdom of God is a Philosophy and a Personality. "For the Jews," he says, "require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the

Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the Wisdom of God" (1 Cor. i. 22—24). And this is not a stray thought: it comes again in the thirtieth verse of the same chapter. "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Thus St. Paul supplies the true key to the Wisdom Literature of the Jews—not that the Jewish writers thought directly of Christ, but rather that they were led unawares towards a doctrine which was afterwards to be more fully revealed.

Thus St. Paul unites with St. John, and Christ is both "Wisdom" and the "Word," a somewhat rare combination. Among men; some are men of wisdom, others men of words. Here, in an ideal man we find both in full perfection. He only can reveal. He is God's Wisdom. All God's thoughts are thought out in Him. He is also the Divine Expression.

In Christ God delights in man. He rejoices in the earth on man's account. The Welsh version reads: "rejoicing in the habitation of the earth," as if God, before he had yet created anything, delighted in the very spot where the earth was to be, on man's account. And God's first delight now is in the "habitable part" of the earth. This is a marvellous proof of God's infinite love. The earth, "where every prospect pleases, and only man is vile," has no interest for its Maker apart from human kind. God must be fond of every form of

beauty; He must love flowers, for otherwise He would not have created so many of them. But He takes a keener delight in a valley full of human life. He rejoices in the "habitable part."

"The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob" (Psalm lxxxvii. 2). In the "dwellings of Jacob" each family worships God by itself; and God loves that. They say that we nowadays are not as religious in our home-life as our forefathers were. If it is so, it is a sad state of affairs. For when God is banished from the hearths of a nation it will not take long to banish Him from the temple as well. God loves the family worship held in the "dwellings of Jacob." But He loves the "gates of Zion" still more. And why? Because there all the dwellings come together, and worship God in solemn assembly. There is a particular blessing to be had in God's sanctuary which you cannot obtain elsewhere. Some people argue thus: Why cannot I read a sermon at home? When a man takes to buying sermons it is time for his Minister to call. God has His altar, and to *that* men must come. "Wherever two or three are *gathered together*, there I am in the midst of them."

In Zion God's wisdom is at its best. The deepest wisdom of God has been revealed in the Church. "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God" (Ephes. iii. 10). "The *manifold* wisdom": there is a fold of it revealed in Creation and Providence, but not all.

Here all is revealed: "the manifold wisdom of God." Redemption is as perfect a revelation of God as could be given. "God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

II. *This Wisdom of God claims to direct men,* to plan their lives for them and to lead them. This Wisdom crieth and uttereth her voice. "Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man. O ye simple, understand wisdom; and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart."

There are at least two conceptions of the spring of moral actions—"fear" and "love." The first was the Old Testament idea: "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." We find the second in the New Testament: "the love of God constraineth us." Man's highest life is to love God for His own sake, and to let virtue be its own reward. There is a Heaven; it is not a dream: there is a Hell; who can doubt it? And, in a crude age, these must be used as moral inducements. But they are not the highest appeals. Man cannot hate sin simply as sin brings punishment, for such hatred of sin would be nothing more or less than a form of self-love, and self-love is of the very essence of sin. The motive to a good life must be the love of Christ shed abroad in the heart.

God is infinitely interested in each human life. He looks and listens. His ears are ever open. Bartimaeus—blind and poor by the road-side—cried out to Jesus, and Jesus heard him." The crowd charged

him "that he should hold his peace." It is ever so. But when he seems about to get that which he cries for—when Christ calls him—the same people are the very first to congratulate him, saying: "Be of good comfort, rise, he calleth thee." Hagar, lonely and in despair in the wilderness of Beersheba, attracted the notice of Heaven by her cry. Thus God loves men, and desires to dwell among them. Men have a tendency to separate themselves from their fellow-men. They remove from the city to the suburbs, from the house in the row to the mansion and the park. What higher proof is needed that God loveth the habitable part of the earth than that He has come to dwell there Himself? It was once asked: "Will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?" The answer has come. "The saying is true." "And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God." When His mother lost the child Jesus she looked for Him in the *crowd*. John saw the Divine Idea fulfilled: and lo, "a great multitude which no man can number, of all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues stood before the Throne and before the Lamb." Amen.

## XVIII.

### THE LAMP OF THE WORD.

*"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."* PSALM cxix. 105.

THE Book of Psalms is, strictly speaking, the only devotional book in our sacred collection. In the New Testament there is no book of devotion. There are books of narrative and of doctrine, but no book of prayers or of hymns. One reason for this is that no great development is possible in the spiritual experiences of men since the early days of Israel. Another reason is, the permanent value of the Book of Psalms as an inspired expression of those experiences.

Religion is both inward and outward, subjective and objective. It is a Revelation without and an Inspiration within. In the former, there has been a continuous progress. There was once a "*dawn of Revelation*," when, after a long night of gloom and desolation, the truth first began to reveal itself dimly on the horizon. That faint glimmer grew into the perfect day. The Incarnation was the crowning act of the self-revelation of God to man. Yet religion as it is in the heart is ever much the same. Not only is it the same in the history of the Jews under the Old Testament and in the history of the Christian Church under the New, but it is the

same in all the great religions of the world. What are the so-called "permanent elements in religion"? Whatever they are, whether fear or faith, superstition or reverence, they are in all lands and ages the same in essence, however much they may differ in form.

And these primary and fundamental root-ideas of religion are embodied in the Psalms in a way to which we can find no equal in any other book. The Psalms, then, have a permanent value, not only because they are so clearly Divine in origin, but also, and to an almost equal degree, because they are so human in sentiment and expression. Their historical value is challenged. They are said to be of late date and we are sometimes assured that hardly any of them can be of Davidic authorship. Be that as it may, this Hymn Book of the Second Temple will retain its hold upon serious minds as long as they find in it an expression of the predominant thoughts of a religious man in whatever age.

This Psalm is in praise of God's Word. The Psalm stands alone for many reasons. It is unique in its structural beauty. It is probably the most artistic in plan and execution of all the Psalms. It all turns around one great central thought, the glory of God's Word; and the theme is treated with the fullest wealth of illustration and finish. It is clearly a Psalm of deep feeling. John Ruskin says of it that it was the Psalm which in his youth he hated most, and which, in his old age, he loved best. It is a rare combination to find deep feeling expressed

in perfect form. This Psalm is not a marble statue, perfect but cold and dead; it is a loving tribute of a heart nourished upon God's Word.

*These words present before us Revelation in its practical aim.* "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Mathew Arnold, following a German master, thought and taught that the practical aim was the only aim of Revelation. That, however, was but half the truth, The word of God is a lamp to the understanding, to show us what to believe. It is a lamp to our hearts, to teach us what to love; and in this particular expression, it is a "lamp unto our feet," to teach us how we should walk.

*A lamp to the feet.* "Walking," in the Bible, means living. It is the usual expression for moral conduct. "Enoch walked with God." "Those who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." But why is this? The word must be taken as an illustration of the influence of habits of life upon language. The original mode of life was nomadic. Nations first live by continual movement. They do not settle down until they are sufficiently civilised. Thus the fathers of Israel had dwelt in tents, with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The ancient shrines at Bethel and Shiloh were but proofs of their wanderings. Such was Abraham's faith that he hoped for a "city." He had never seen a house. He was a wanderer, but a wanderer with God.

"Walking" suggests a particular, definite direction, and a consistent movement in that direction.



Life means moral progress in goodness or evil. When we estimate characters we usually strike an average. We add a man's failings up on the one side, and his good qualities on the other, and then give a generous judgment upon the result. God does not strike an average. To Him all are either good or bad. He takes no account of the manufactured morality of a sinner, and He "forgets" the shortcomings of His saints. All men's lives mean to God definite moral progress in a fixed direction.

But in spite of the fundamental oneness of all human experience, there is a peculiarity, an individuality, which belongs to each life. Thus we read here of a "light unto the *path*." The road is for the many; the path is for the few, for the one. Though we "like sheep" have gone astray; that is, following each other, all in a flock, still "each turned his own way." Each life has its own temptations, trials, successes and failures. And "every *one* of us shall give account of himself to God." And God's Word, as here set forth, sheds by its continued inspiration a *special* light on all the *special* problems of each life. It is a light unto the path—the lonely, solitary path. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

It is often hard to realise that all Revelation is practical. There is a practical side to every truth however abstract, and the practical is the final object of all. "All scripture is given by the inspiration of God . . . that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

But it often becomes one of the most difficult duties of our Christian life to connect the great doctrines of our faith with our common experience. What, it may be asked, have such great truths as those of the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Atonement to do with our daily life? They seem far off, out of every connection with our experience. Yet when we know them better we shall find that the deepest truths are often the most practical. As we grow in the knowledge of truth we grow, also, in our power to assimilate and use it. It is ever the same with the forces of Nature. Think of Electricity. The rude savage looks at the storm of thunder and lightning with solemn awe, and hides himself. He feels that he is in the presence of powers which are greater and mightier far than he, powers which he is able neither to control nor comprehend. In his alarm he wonders what it can all be for. But as he progresses, masters the laws of this mysterious agency and finds out its method of operation, he finds that this great and awful power is one of the most useful factors in civilised life.

*How, then, is God's Word the lamp of life? It is so,*

I. *Because it reveals the true aim of life.* What is man to live for? Life itself cannot be its own object and end; we must use the advantages of life for some higher purpose. The aim of life, according to the teaching of Christ, is to be perfect. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Man lives, not for himself, but

to glorify God in himself. The meaning of one of the commonest words for sin in the New Testament is to "miss the mark," to fall short of the goal. How can this be remedied? Some think it can only be remedied by adapting the mark to the conditions of humanity. This is what is done in heathen religions, and by the Church of Christ when she falls short of the great ideal. This however is not Christ's method.

A great poet has said, and said truly: "Not failure, but a low aim is sin." We are too apt to judge the lives of men by the two standards of "failure" and "success." The apparently successful man may be in reality, and in the sight of God, the most distressing failure. It is not a question of whether we fail or not, but rather of what we are aiming at. Let us aim at being perfect, even though we fail. Thus spiritual ambition becomes the continual stimulus of the spiritual life. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. . . . I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. iii. 12, 14).

II. *In God's Word, also, we find the true pattern of life.* Revelation is not made in a new theory of perfection set forth in words, but in a perfect Being and a perfect Life lived under human conditions. The soul of the Bible is Christ, Who left us an example that we might follow in His steps. The

secret of the Christian life is the Imitation of Christ. We study His living image in the Gospels, and, beholding the glory of the Lord, we "are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Christ can be an example to all men. The saints of the Old and New Testaments could not be that, for they were not perfect. They very often fell where they were supposed to be strongest. Of this Abraham, Moses and many other prominent saints are instances. In addition to that the conditions under which different saints lived were very varied. Compare, for example, the conditions of the life of St. Paul with those of the life of St. John. But Christ is divine, and is a universal example. We are called upon to be "imitators of God, as dear children" (Ephes. v. 1). In Christ perfection is intelligible and practical. We are to follow in His steps, to walk even as He walked. We have no need to go to Palestine to see the places where He once was. With regard to the exact position of many of these there are endless doubts. But His moral and spiritual footmarks are clear; let us follow them. In this way we shall have "a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path."

III. *God's Word in the soul is the principle and inspiration of life.* It would be vain and even cruel to tell a helpless moral being to be perfect unless we could also point out some method of making him so. It was because of this that the great moral theories of Greece failed. There was no moral motive-

power. The machinery seemed perfect enough, but there was nothing to make it go. The Word of God is a power within as well as a light without. It leads because it governs the heart. It is an inward force. It disciplines the conscience and directs the inward thought. A clean heart is the only secret of an upright life. The Word must be deeper than the memory and the understanding. It must be in the very seat of the higher life as a fashioning and inspiring principle. And thus it becomes a lamp that can never be extinguished, a "hurricane lamp" that can never be put out. Let us, therefore, pray for grace to receive "the engrafted word which is able to save our souls," and, by our being "doers of the word and not hearers only" it shall become for us a lamp for our feet in this our night of earthly life until the Great Dawn shall come and the shadows flee away. Amen.

## XIX.

### THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

*"He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath."*

MATTHEW xiii. 11, 12.

THE primary object of these words in the connection in which we here find them is to explain why our Lord at this time spoke only in parables. This was clearly not His mode of teaching in His early ministry. Many of His recorded sermons—and some of the greatest—belong to a period prior to the adoption of this method. To that period we must assign the Sermon on the Mount, which many to-day regard as the greatest and most important of all our Lord's sermons. Those early utterances of His were in plain, short, intelligible and comprehensible terms. They were meant for all, and were, in a sense, understood by all. In this chapter, however, His teaching underwent a sudden and complete transformation. He now spoke in parables, and in parables only. And though this method of teaching was well-known to

Oriental minds yet our Lord had never before used it. Realising this, the disciples came to Him asking for an explanation. "Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" Then come the words of the text as our Lord's answer to their question: I speak in parables "because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance."

Our first difficulty is to see how this is an explanation at all. How can we trace any connection between these words and the parables and parabolic teaching? In our endeavour to do this we must first notice that our Lord's ministry had at this point a new purpose. And the new purpose justified a new method. The object which our Lord had in view in His earlier sermons was to make a clear and emphatic declaration of an impending change in the spiritual dealings of God with the nation. That proclamation is clothed in simple words, and is meant for everybody: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." John the Baptist had precisely the same message to proclaim. He was a "Voice"—not a "Word," Christ was the "Word"—a shout in the wilderness to awaken the dead formalists and sensualists of his day. That voice conveyed no meaning beyond the fact that a great and supreme crisis had come. The immediate effect of this was to gather a crowd. Now, in the opening verses of this chapter we find that that object had been fully realised; the nation had been aroused,

and the hills and dales of Galilee were in the turmoil of a great and sudden religious awakening.

In such a crowd the motives were almost as numerous as the men who came. Some came from idle curiosity; many from malice, and it is quite probable that only a few came from the high hope that the fulness of the time had at last arrived. Our Lord, therefore, had to "judge" the people, to divide this heterogeneous mass of humanity; and for this work He found in the parable the necessary instrument. We find, then, that the parable was primarily meant, not to further explain the truth, but to "judge" the hearers. If our Lord's only purpose had been to make the truth simpler and easier to understand He would not have spoken in parables. For a parable does not necessarily make the truth plainer. In St. John xvi. 29 "speaking plainly" and "speaking in parables" are put in marked contrast. "Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb"—no parable. In fact we are told (Mark iv. 12) that our Lord spoke in parables so that some people might not understand: "That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them."

Yet the parable, though in itself it might hinder men from arriving at the truth, still to those who were already spiritually-minded it became the means of further light. "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given." And this is a universal law. The people who have are always the people who receive.



A man with no art in his soul goes to the Autumn Exhibition. He goes in just because it happens to be a rainy day. It is miserable outside, and so he substitutes one misery for another, and goes in to see the paintings. Yet, though he sees everything, he sees nothing. He brought nothing with him into the Gallery, and he got nothing in return and takes nothing away. "Seeing, he saw, but he did not perceive." He got in proportion to what he had.

Or take another illustration from life. I happened to be staying a short time ago with an old College friend of mine, and he showed me a photograph which he kept with great care. To me that photograph conveyed nothing. I could only see the venerable and kindly-looking face of a lady in the autumn tints of life. Yet to look at that photograph brought tears to the eyes of my friend. It was all that was left to him of her who was to him the dearest of mothers. Visions of happy childhood, of school and college, of home and early manhood, crowded upon him as he looked upon it. It appealed to what was tenderest within him.

In precisely the same way stood the pictures our Lord drew for men in His parables. Those who knew not God could not recognise His likeness, and they went away empty. "He that hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." But to those who were already in spiritual touch with the mysteries of the kingdom these parables conveyed much. They read in them the mind of God. "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given." The parables were thus intended for those to whom it

had been given "to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven."

When we take a broader view of these words in their general relation to the truth revealed to the Church at all times we find that our Lord here enunciates two great principles of knowledge in spiritual things. We find here, first, *that the kingdom of heaven is a kingdom of mysteries.* We also find *that these mysteries are revealed in proportion to the use we make of our own spiritual instincts.* "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance."

I. Firstly, then, we note *the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.*

The word "mystery" is to be found in a two-fold sense in the New Testament. To begin with, "mystery" means a thing which, owing to its inherent incomprehensibility to man, cannot under any conditions be revealed. We live in the age of pure reason. The great cult of the day is the cult of intellect. We know much, and we are gradually getting to know more. We argue, therefore, that in time we shall know everything. Were Natural Phenomena the only possible realm of thought that might have been true. Man will practically master Nature through and through at some future date. But the "kingdom of heaven" helps the world on to a deeper sobriety of thought if only by continually keeping before it the fact that there are things in heaven and earth in the existence of which man has to believe, but which he cannot explain or

even comprehend. There are things which are intrinsically and necessarily mysteries.

Such, however, cannot be the meaning of the word here; for the mysteries here spoken of are mysteries to be known. These are not mysteries because they *cannot* be revealed owing to their depth and magnitude; they are mysteries only at this time, owing to the economy of God. Thus St. Paul speaks of the call of the Gentiles as a great mystery, not because it was in itself above thought, but rather because hitherto it had not been revealed. "Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." Thus these mysteries of the kingdom are not beyond revelation. They are mysteries to be "known."

But the question naturally suggests itself: "Why should there be any mystery?" If God intended to reveal His mind at all why did He not do so in one complete and final act of self-revelation? The souls of men are being continually perplexed by their futile efforts to comprehend things which they cannot fathom. The moral teaching of the Gospel is plain, and most of the History is intelligible; then why need there be doctrines and mysteries?

1. On this question it must be remembered as a general maxim that the fact of there being a mystery in connection with anything does not necessarily hinder us from making the utmost practical use of that thing. We certainly use some things better according as we understand them better. But we

understand things better by using them more. We start by using things before we know them. It follows then that mystery is not confined to Christian truth alone; every truth has in it an element of mystery. There are always those who argue that it is neither fair nor healthy to feed the mind with faiths which the reason cannot measure. No man, they say, ought to believe anything except what he can understand. Let all "mystery," therefore, be put aside, and let the Church fix her faith in comprehensible terms. Our first answer to that is: apply it first to your bodily wants and social habits. Teach the people that they ought not to eat anything except that which they know all about. Let every man, first of all, pass an examination in all the history and development of what is placed on the table before him before he touches anything. It is clear that, physically, we should all starve were it not that we live by faith.

In our great cities to-day most things are driven by electricity. All the cars are propelled and lighted by this mysterious natural force. Why not therefore teach the public? Why not distribute "Primers of Science" to the masses of the people, and tell them they ought not to travel on an electric car until they know all about electricity? Of such madness no one has ever dreamt. We live by employing the unknown, which is not the less unknown the more we know it. It follows then that there is nothing contrary at least to the usual and necessary habits of men in asking them to rest their souls on a kingdom of mysteries.

2. Again, every revelation from God must necessarily be accompanied by a mystery. It is so not simply owing to the arbitrary word and will of God, but from the necessities of the case. In every revelation from God, for one thing, a divine and a human mode of thinking come into contact. When God speaks to man it is not as when man speaks to man. A man could conceivably exchange every thought that ever passed through his brain with another man of a congenial mind. Both minds are on the same plane of existence. But the thoughts of God can only come to us in parts, and though much has come there is more left unrevealed. Every revelation that comes into the world comes attended by corresponding mysteries. Indeed every fresh revelation points to a still deeper mystery, just as a man looking through his telescope at a star sees other stars of whose existence he was not previously aware. He turns away from his telescope with fuller knowledge certainly, but still a sadder and a wiser man because he has been again reminded of the vastness of God's creation. Thus we read in St. John's Gospel: "No man hath seen God at any time;" but now a revelation of God has been given: "The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." But, again, the Incarnation is itself the greatest of all mysteries. Great was the mystery of God; yes, and "great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh."

3. Lastly, this very mystery, however perplexing, will be to all serious minds the highest proof

of the divine origin of it all. No man can comprehend Christian truth fully; it certainly follows then that no human intellect could have given it being. As Ruskin says: it is one of the marks of divine truth that it should appear self-contradictory. In the mind of God it exists in eternal unity. To us it has come in parts, and we often fail in our attempts to fit the parts together. "Believing when we cannot see," for the kingdom is a kingdom in a mystery.

II. Our second principle is that *the Revelation we obtain of these mysteries is in proportion to the use we make of our own spiritual instincts*. "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance."

And this is the general law. The method is scientific. We are to argue about the unknown from what we can be certain about. "Whosoever hath." It is always the hardest thing to persuade people to make use of that which lies close to their hands. We are told that the oldest science is Astronomy; the first things studied by men were the stars, and the stars are the furthest things we can see. The youngest science, it seems, is Geology, and that has to do with the very earth under our feet.

"Whosoever hath." What can this mean? What have we at all that we can thus use to help us to better understand the mysteries? (a) First, we have all our natural instincts. But these are depraved: true, but not entirely so. Rome is in ruins, still we can form some idea of the architec-

ture even from those very ruins. No one would be interested in ruins did they not suggest former greatness. Man has been both great and good, and the ruins of humanity are the ruins of a perfect Temple built by God for Himself. Goodness may be now no more than a forgotten dream; but you can recall it. You remember how the king in the book of Daniel had not only failed to understand his dream, but had altogether forgotten it. The wise men came, and, probably, relying upon the fact that the dream had been quite forgotten, told the king their own imaginations. But he could not be deceived. Though he had forgotten his dream still he would recognise it if he heard it, and he instantly did so when Daniel repeated it to him. In the same way the Gospel appeals to the dormant past in the experience of the soul. It recalls a forgotten reality. The instincts of humanity respond to the touch.

It is the accepted tradition that Homer, the great Greek poet, was, like Milton, a blind man. But those who have carefully studied his works are firmly of opinion that, even if he was really blind when he wrote his poems, he could not have been always so. Though he never attributes colour to a flower and never calls the sky blue, yet he has descriptions of the dawn and the incoming tide which, it is agreed, could never have been written by a man who had never seen those things. In a similar way, the moral and spiritual blindness of humanity was not from the beginning. Men see now because they once saw before. The human race was not "born blind."

There is a natural and there is also an artificial way of thinking, and the natural way always leads to faith. You can persuade yourselves to believe anything, but if you leave the mind to run instinctively it will rest in the truths of religion. The Atheist and the Agnostic and the Positivist are the products of our civilisation. There are no Agnostics among savage tribes. And why? Simply because they have not been fettered by any intellectual pride or affection; they have followed their own instincts. The child who has buried his father believes in another world. He would have had to do violence to his own nature to think otherwise.

(b) There is, in addition to this natural bent, a new power given by the grace of the Spirit of Christ. "We have the mind of Christ." "We know that the Son of God is come, and he has given us an understanding that we may know him that is true." This power we have to use. By this light we are to live. And the Church around us has been so ordained by Christ as to be our help in fostering its development. All these things "we have," besides the "Spirit of truth which leadeth into all truth." By employing these we shall gradually come to know the mysteries.

God's salvation, in conclusion, is a salvation by the revelation of truth. The keynote of the Plan of Salvation is not our safety but our eternal growth. God means that we shall forever share His own thoughts. And this we do if we make any truth, however small, our own. According to an ancient



custom in Wales land was once secured by secretly building a hut on the open common in the silent hours of the night. If this could be done without attracting the notice of the lord of the manor, and if the smoke ascended from the simple hearth at dawn, then the following day the land surrounding the hut would be the man's inheritance for ever. We are but hurried labourers erecting our simple huts on the vast expanse of truth, and we do it often in the darkness of the night. But if at the dawn of the eternal day that is to come we shall have made any truth our own by sympathy and faith, then will God grant us an eternal inheritance in the light of Truth. Let us cling on to these mysteries until the great dawn breaks and the darkness is no more. Amen.

## XX.

### THE HIGHER LIFE.

*"If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."* PHILIPPIANS iii. 11, 12.

THE interest and charm of St. Paul's Epistles is due in part to the fact that he talks so freely in them about himself. We catch frequent glimpses of his inner soul. This personal element is not only interesting, but useful as well. It helps us, for one thing, to trace the gradual development of the Apostle's faith. By comparing different Epistles, written at different times, we see how his knowledge and experience grew. And our conception of Inspiration makes this important. In the Scriptures we have God revealing Himself in historical events and in human personalities. The revelation was not, after all, in what men said or wrote, but in the men themselves, who were the "chosen vessels" of God. And the more we know of them the better we can understand their teaching.

St. Paul gives practically the whole of this chapter to a picture of himself. This he felt he could do when writing to a church so devoted and so sym-

pathetic as the church in Philippi. He looks at himself from two standpoints. In verses 4—6, he describes to us *what he had been*, and in verses 8—11 what he *aimed to be*. In the Apostle's past there was really no cause for shame. The Apostle, before his conversion, was one of the highest types of human character which the world, apart from the Gospel, could produce. In his conversion we find the experience of a man who was already the ripest fruit of the culture and faith of his day. He was "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." Yet the Apostle regarded this highly conscientious and respectable past with horror and shame. On another occasion the contemplation of it caused him to describe himself as the chief of sinners. He always thanked God that he was not what he had been.

But he found no comfort in regarding himself in the light of what he hoped to be. "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do . . . I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." These words contain the Message of the Gospel to the saved. The Gospel's chief and first appeal is to the sinner, but there is often the danger of suggesting, though unintentionally, that the work is done when the sinner "decides for Christ," and is reckoned among the saints. The New Testament really contains no message for the sinner directly. Christ spoke oftener to His chosen disciples than to the open crowd. There are no Epistles to the sinners; all are addressed to the saints. Spiritual reali-

ties cannot be seen or appreciated by the man who is not twice born. The beauty of the Cathedral windows cannot be appreciated from the street. They are intelligible and beautiful only to those within. St. Paul here speaks of himself as he was in Christ Jesus, and of this higher life he says three things. It is

I. *A life of high aim.*

II. *A life of apparent failure.*

III. *A life of constant perseverance.*

I. *It is a life of high aim—the highest aim.*  
“If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” What does the Apostle mean by that? Is not the resurrection the common inheritance of all men? Are we raised upon condition that we strive for it, and win it? Are the just alone raised?

Consider St. Paul's characteristic teaching on this question of resurrection. According to him the Christian life is, on the one hand, based upon a resurrection; and, on the other, it culminates and is made perfect in a resurrection. The Christian man lives on earth between two great resurrections; the one is a fact of experience and is already passed, the other is the high object of hope and endeavour. St. Paul in his teaching lays great stress on the mystical union which exists between the saints and their ascended and glorified Lord. They shared all His experiences. They were “crucified with him,” and they were “buried with him by baptism

unto death." They were "risen" with Christ, and were "made to sit with him in the heavenly places." The beginning and foundation of their spiritual life was this experience of resurrection with Christ. The saints are men already raised from the dead (Ephes. ii. 1).

This is the beginning. And the work, thus begun in a spiritual resurrection in Christ, is, at the last day, to be consummated in the resurrection of the body. St. Paul says but little in his Epistles about the general resurrection of all men. It does not follow that he does not accept and teach that doctrine. Here, as in 1 Cor. xv., he is thinking mainly of the resurrection of the just; and this is suggested by the very words used. He calls it "resurrection *from* the dead" (R.V.). Of the saints alone is this true. A general resurrection may be a resurrection *of* the dead, not *from* the dead. The resurrection of the sinner is only the removal of the body and soul from one state of death into another. The man was dead before—body and soul apart; he is still dead—body and soul re-united. He has not come out of death unto life. The just are raised "*from*" the dead; the last link that joined them to any form of death is broken. And to the mind of the Apostle sin and death went together: "The wages of sin is death." To have finished with death is only possible when we have finished with sin. So the "resurrection *from* the dead" stands for the perfection which is our aim.

By way of further analysis of this perfection which the resurrection represents, and which is the

high object of our spiritual hope, St. Paul uses two expressions:—

(a) Knowledge. "The excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, our Lord,"—to know the Lord, and, in a sense, to know even as the Lord knows. This includes the intellectual growth of mankind up to the furthest limits of its possibilities. The mind of man, though finite, is capable of eternal growth; and the love of Christ, which is to be known, is even "above knowledge." Man is saved ultimately by Truth, by apprehension of the "truth as it is in Jesus." All emotion will evaporate unless based upon truth. This is the heart's knowledge of God in Christ. There can be no greater error than to say that religion dwarfs the soul: it is the one condition of its eternal development and progress.

(b) Righteousness. "The righteousness which is of God through faith." This is moral progress; it is more than safety, it is growth. Perfection in the New Testament is not a negative thing. It is not the mere absence of sin. It is the presence, in full maturity, of all the excellencies which exist in their fullest glory in God's own character. There is always a danger of forgetting this, of regarding conversion as the end, and not as the beginning, of the Christian life. Progress is our only safeguard against "shrinking back unto perdition" (Heb. x. 38, 39). And this progress culminates as to its present, and re-starts as to its eternal course, in the "resurrection from the dead."

II. *The higher life is a life of apparent failure.*  
"Not that I have already obtained" (R.V.).  
"Brethren, I count not myself yet to have apprehended."

There is in every great life an element of apparent failure. The greater the life the greater the seeming tragedy of it. A mean, small life may, in the main, be successful along all the lines of its activity. The man aims at little, and attains it. And thus we often, going simply by appearances, count that man honoured who has done all he tried to do, not regarding always the smallness and the triviality of what he lived for. It is better to fail in great things than to succeed in little things. Take the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, the great pattern and ideal. His life, judged by ordinary human standards, was altogether a failure. As a preacher He attracted a crowd to hear Him, but He failed to convince men. His followers were few when He died, and those few were ignorant and narrow-minded. He made no mark in the world, as men regard fame; and when He died, He seemed to have perished at the hands of enemies who were stronger than He, and to have died without "having attained." Anyone looking at Him as He, when still in the prime of early manhood, wearily carried His cross to Calvary would have said: "There goes another who has tried and failed." But still He did not fail. His life is the crowning success of history. Of Him alone can it be said that He met the world squarely and overcome it.

"Not failure, but low aim is sin." It is no sin to fail; to sin is to waste one's energies on enterprises which are not worthy. Judge no man a failure until you know what he was really trying to do. There is a success which is a sin.

Thus, after all, the greatest real successes in life are its apparent failures. We cannot go by appearances. The saints have always been a band of foreigners and pilgrims in the world, who seek and yet appear never to find. The world calls them unpractical idealists, and so tries to dismiss them. They seem to live without attaining, and even to die<sup>ex</sup> without having obtained the promises." They simply salute their vanishing hopes, and declare themselves as seekers for a land not to be found on earth, and for "a city having foundations, whose builder and maker is God." They are always faint, yet pursuing.

We can never fully attain, because the standard is ever lifted up even as we grow towards it. The ethics of the New Testament is so much higher than that of the Old. A progressive world needs always fresh ideals. It is the business of its leaders to keep it ever on the alert, ever unsatisfied. Life is a continuous climb, and the reward for climbing one cliff is to be privileged to see the next, which is higher, and so to those which are higher still up to the very throne of God.

He was a wise sculptor who once told his friends just after he had completed a masterpiece: "Ah! you may congratulate me; but I know my powers are declining, for I have at last pleased myself." It



is always the man who knows most who is most painfully conscious of his limitations and ignorance. The saint alone is overwhelmed with a sense of his sin. The disciple of Christ has always in him a "divine discontent." If we could only get at St. Paul's experience even now, after he has been nearly two thousand years in heaven, it would still be the same. "I count not myself to have attained, but I press on."

III. *The higher life is a life of constant labour and perseverance.* The failure did not discourage the Apostle; it spurred him on to greater effort.

There are two words used here to express this: (a) Forgetting. "Forgetting the things which are behind." This does not mean disregard of the fundamentals; all progress is built upon those. But what are we to forget? For one thing, we are to forget our sins. It serves no good and useful purpose to be continually brooding upon our own shortcomings. Beware lest your religion becomes too introspective. We are to run the race set before us, not by looking at or into our own hearts, but by "looking unto Jesus." Repent, and so leave your sins to God. If He has forgiven, nay even forgotten them, why should you keep them in mind to hinder you on your path? And so with your good deeds. Should you happen to have any of them to your account do not be continually thinking about them. Forget them; they only hinder you. You need keep no account; God sees to that. He is not unmindful of our feeble efforts after goodness. Even

our tears are all in His keeping. At the last day every one of the good deeds the saints had done had been forgotten by them; but there was One Who had not forgotten the least of them: "Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?" They had forgotten all about it. Let no man trust to his past, nor be hindered by it. The past is often the devil's weapon. Leave the past to the forgiving love of God, and press on.

(b) Pressing on—"reaching forth," "stretching forward" to the things before." All that is highest and noblest and best is in the future, is yet to be attained.

How are we to press on? By making the highest use of all that God has already put within our reach. It is to be done not by empty, poetic dreaming, but by seemingly prosaic practical effort. Waste not your time in tears for the things you never had. Use what you have, and press on. You will get more if you do that. Jacob's ladder reached to heaven; one end of it, however, was on the earth; and the first way of finding the other end is to make use of the nearest. The "resurrection of the just" seems far away, infinitely distant even to the eye of faith. Still the way to attain it starts just from where you stand. No one needs climb to heaven or descend to hell to find it. "The word is in thy mouth." If you so try, Christ will take hold of you. Mark the words of St. Paul: "Apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ

Jesus." We are to place ourselves implicitly in God's hands, and we shall be rewarded to the extent of our obedience. The apparent failure will prove itself to be a real triumph in the resurrection from the dead. Amen.